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HAIG

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HAIG OF BEMERSYDE  
*Photopress photograph*

# H A I G

The Second Volume

by

DUFF COOPER

*Author of Talleyrand*

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*Page 193.* Haig discovered soon afterwards that the first information which he received and recorded in his diary concerning the German counter-attack of November 30th 1917 was incorrect, but he made no further written reference to the event.

## Chapter XVI

### NEW LEADERS

**T**he Duke of Wellington used to say that the chief problem of war was to find out what was taking place on the other side of the hill. Although the conquest of the air has taken from the aphorism some of its literal significance, it remains, in a more abstract sense, as true as when it was uttered. The Air Force can bring information with regard to the disposition of troops on the other side of the line, and some rough estimate may be formed of the number of casualties inflicted; but the more valuable information is not so easily obtained. The important things to know after a great battle are the psychological effect it has had upon the enemy, how hard it has hit him, how much it has hurt, what is taking place, not on the other side of the hill, but in the minds of the men in the trenches, at the headquarters of the generals and in the council chamber of the Government.

Difference of opinion as to the real result of the Battle of the Somme was to prove the main source of long and arduous conflict between men who should have been collaborating in complete harmony through the difficult days that lay ahead. There were some to whom it seemed that nothing had been gained but a few square miles of devastated territory, marked by the names of what had once been villages of slight importance. And this pitiful gain had been acquired at the price of tremendous sacrifice. If these pre-

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mises were correct, the conclusion naturally followed that the war was being fought upon the wrong lines and that another method must be adopted.

Others, on the contrary, believed that the German Army had, with heroism, sustained a staggering blow; that the giant was tottering, and that if it were only possible to strike once more with equal force before his balance was recovered, he might come crashing to the ground.

That the latter view was the correct one is now generally admitted by unprejudiced historians of the war. Three facts may be recorded in support of it. After the Somme the Germans changed their Commander-in-Chief, just as they had changed him after the Marne; they deliberately prepared to withdraw from the line that they were holding and thus to narrow their front; and for the first time in the war they offered terms of peace to the enemy. It is possible that they may have found a better Commander-in-Chief; it is true that they strengthened their position by retiring; and the peace terms that they offered were certainly not those of a beaten nation. But even the German authorities' limited knowledge of psychology must have warned them that the three events taken in conjunction were bound to strike a chill into the hearts of a population that had been fed on tales of an all wise High Command leading an overpowering, invincible army steadily forward to complete victory and the dictation of terms to an utterly vanquished foe.

Haig and Joffre were not yet in possession of all the facts, and they were long to remain in ignorance of the evidence from enemy sources quoted at the end of the last chapter, but their soldierly instinct told them that they had struck hard and true, and that it was their duty to press home their attack.

Before the battle was over they were already taking counsel with one another as to their plans for the coming

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year. On the 1st of November Joffre wrote Haig a long letter in which he outlined his proposals. The following were his main points. The French and the English attacks should be delivered simultaneously, and the front over which they were delivered should be as broad as possible. The limits of the English attack were to be, roughly, Bapaume and Vimy, while the French advanced through the valleys of the Oise and the Somme. This would leave an extensive gap between the two attacking armies. Here the Allies should act on the defensive, assuming that, if the two attacks succeeded, the enemy would be compelled to retire in order to preserve his centre from becoming isolated. Meanwhile, during the winter months, a continual offensive on a minor scale was to be maintained. The enemy was to be given no peace. Harassed as he already was, he was not to be allowed a moment's breathing space wherein to collect his thoughts and to calm his nerves.

Haig's reply to Joffre's letter is printed in full in the appendix. It is important because it has been asserted<sup>1</sup> that Haig was unwilling at the time to collaborate in Joffre's plan, and that it was due to the condition of the British Army that the successes of the Battle of the Somme were not followed up. The text of his letter proves, on the other hand, that he entirely concurred in Joffre's views, that he was prepared to do everything in his power to assist in carrying them out, but that he thought it wise to warn Joffre beforehand of the difficulties under which he was fighting and of the limitations that those difficulties must impose upon the success of his efforts.

On November 15th a conference was held at Chantilly which was attended by military representatives of all the Allies. No civilians were present. Haig writes: "The main

<sup>1</sup>By the late General Mangin in a series of articles that appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*.

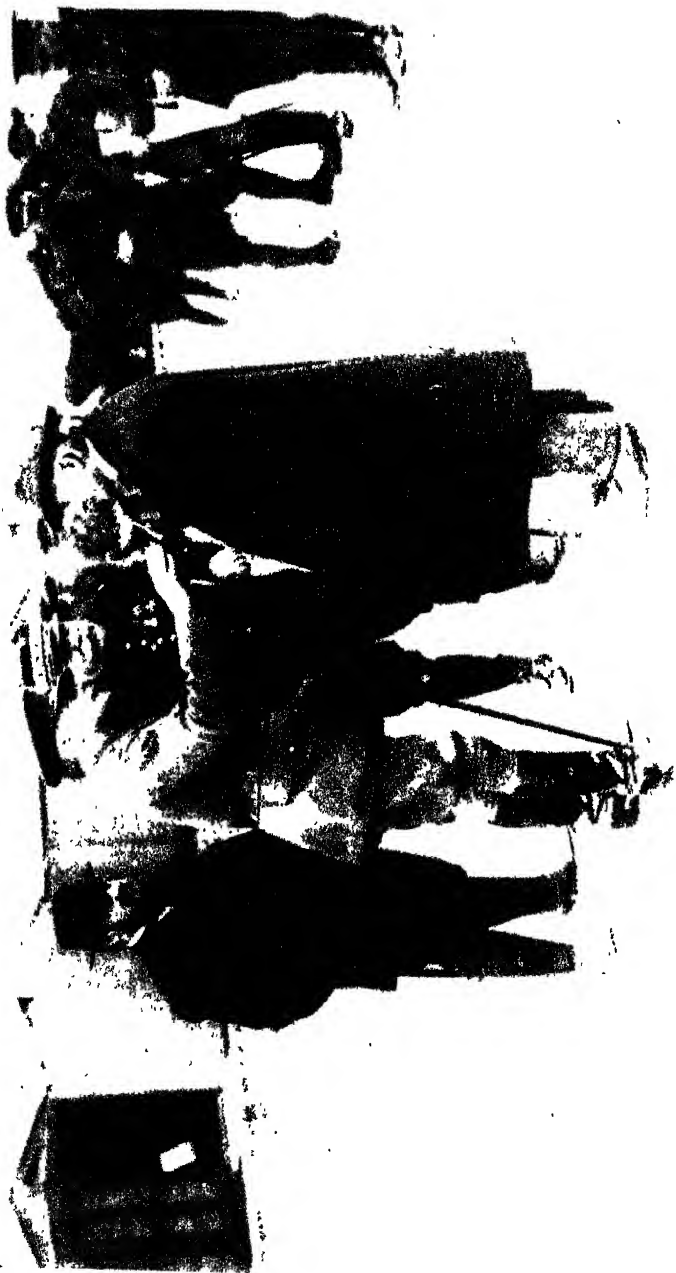


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discussions were on the Balkan question. On this the Roumanians, Italians and Serbs were the chief talkers and the Russians followed them close. They wanted more troops to be sent to Salonika. Joffre was stronger in argument against such a course than even the British. Joffre has had to argue on both sides according as to how his Government ordered."

The following day the military conference had a short sitting in the morning, after which they all motored to Paris and lunched with M. Briand at the Quai d'Orsay.

"I sat between M. Ribot (Minister of Finance), an old man of 80, and General Kachich of Serbia. It was a lengthy meal. I left with Mr. Lloyd George about 2.15 and took a walk for half an hour, then returned to the hotel where we had a talk with the Prime Minister. At 3 p.m. we assembled at the Quai d'Orsay. We consisted of the British Government representatives (Mr. Asquith and Lloyd George) with Lord Bertie, Robertson and myself. France was represented by M. Briand, Joffre and Admiral Lacaze. Italy by the two Italian Ambassadors (old and new one), the Finance Minister from Rome, and General Porro (the Italian Chief of Staff). Russia by the Ambassador only (M. Isvolsky). General Joffre read the conclusions of the Chantilly conference. Lloyd George asked several questions with a view to having more troops sent to Salonika. But he was crushed both by the French and the information which Robertson gave regarding the nature of the communications in the Balkans. Even 'Son Excellence Porro' spoke usefully for once and said that the Italian general there had reported that he could not feed even one more brigade. Then the Italian Finance Minister made a feeble appeal for help. Mr. Asquith made an excellent reply; said that we were all suffering, Great Britain was financing every one of the Allies and Italy knew she would receive help, but she





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must play her part. M. Briand followed on similar lines. The conclusions of the Chantilly conference are to be ratified by another conference which is to take place at the Czar's headquarters in Russia.

"... I dined with M. and Madame Poincaré, President of the Republic, at the Elysée at 8 p.m. Madame Poincaré was the only lady present amongst 41 men. I arrived punctually and was received with much cordiality by the President and Madame, and had a few minutes conversation before the next guest was announced. M. Poincaré is said to be the lady's third husband. Yet it is difficult to see in what lies this lady's attractiveness. She is small, rather fat and ugly and appeared to me rather shy and awkward, standing in the middle of a big room with the President receiving guests.

"I sat between M. Viviani (the Prime Minister at the beginning of the war) and the Serbian general again. I found Viviani quite interesting and after dinner when the guests were all in the smoking room, he sent for the President's secretary and took me round the rooms which used to be occupied by Napoleon, the bathroom to which he came direct from Waterloo, etc."

The main conclusions of the Chantilly conference were as follows:

"(1) That all are unanimously of opinion that the western theatre is the main one and that the resources employed in the other theatres should be reduced to the smallest possible.

"(2) That all the Allies will continue to press the enemy throughout the winter as far as climatic conditions permit.

"(3) That if one of the Allies is attacked, the others will at once take the offensive to relieve the pressure elsewhere. With this object all agreed to complete their offensive preparations early next year.

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“(4) If the enemy leaves the initiative to the Allies, the date of the general offensive will be settled later to meet the general situation. With this in view, Commanders-in-Chief will arrange to keep in the closest touch.”

Two days later Haig attended one of those weekly conferences of army commanders which had been suspended during the Battle of the Somme, but were now resumed. He thus briefly summed up the objectives of the British Army during the months that lay ahead:

“(1) To be ready for the unforeseen, i.e. either to receive an attack (*a*) on the British or (*b*) on one of the Allies. In the case of (*a*) we hold our ground and do not allow our general plans to be upset—so most essential to see to our positions and system of defence. In the case of (*b*) it is possible that we may have to attack to withdraw pressure from an ally. Consequently several points suitable for an attack should be prepared.

“(2) Prevent enemy from recovering from his demoralised condition by methodical pressure when and where possible, according to our means.

“(3) Prepare for general combined offensive by all the Allies simultaneously. Training most important. Railways must be seen to at once. Sir Eric Geddes (D.G.T.) explained a few of our difficulties. Shortage of steel, wagons, etc.”

Meanwhile Haig still had at the back of his mind the possibility of making an attack on the northern flank, and reports that he received about this time with regard to conditions in the Channel seemed to render it the more desirable. On November 20th, “Admiral Bacon came from Dover to see me and stayed the night. He considers that the situation in the Channel is much less satisfactory than it was. The German sailors have learnt much, and their recent raid has opened their eyes to the fact that they can interfere with our communications without much danger or difficulty.

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He (the Admiral) cannot prevent these raids. I gather from this that our command of the Channel is precarious, and that our ports may be closed oftener in the future than in the past. Three points seem to be necessary:

“(1) Improve our system of information so that the Admiral may receive timely warning of hostile concentration;

“(2) Concentrate more destroyers in the Channel;

“(3) Keep larger reserves in France for the Army.

“As regards a landing on the Belgian coast, it was agreed that I should notify the Admiral should any special boats be desirable. Meantime, in view of the shortage of steel, I thought it better that nothing special should be ordered at present.”

Two days later he crossed to England and on November 23rd he had a busy day in London. “A fine day. I attended the War Committee at 10 Downing Street at 11.30 a.m. . . .

“There was a heated discussion over the shortage of shipping in which Mr. Runciman (Board of Trade) criticised the management of Admiralty and War Office. Lloyd George successfully maintained the position of the War Office and said that the solution of the shipping shortage should be sought by reducing the consumption of imported supplies in England.

“We sat till 1.45. I then called for Doris and lunched with Lord Derby. I sat next Mr. Lloyd George. After lunch I urged that since the principle that the western front is the decisive theatre of war had been officially accepted, we should faithfully give effect to everything which that principle implied. That is to say that Italian troops and guns should be brought to France, also that Italian and Russian guns should be massed at the points at which they can best help the Allies in France. Lloyd George said that he was much struck by my suggestion.

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“At 3.30 I met Mr. Montagu<sup>1</sup> Then at 4 p.m. I discussed the situation of the Belgian front with General Robertson, Admirals Jackson and Oliver of the Admiralty and Admiral Bacon from Dover. I pointed out that we had worked hand in hand with the Navy, and had prepared schemes for various eventualities in every detail. We were ready to cooperate when the military situation was favourable.

“At 5 p.m. I had a conference with Mr. Montagu, Mr. Stern, Generals Davidson, Whigham and others regarding tanks. I said I would like as many tanks as possible by 1st May. At the same time the provision of railway wagons was most important.”

Much was taking place behind the scenes in London during the foggy days and dark nights—for the lamps were half extinguished—of these late autumn months. For two years the English people had been at war; bereavement was widespread and hope was beginning to falter. On such occasions it is not in the nature of the English to blame their soldiers—generals or privates—but it is in their nature, on all occasions, to blame the Government. The discontent which began to manifest itself throughout the country was fanned to fever heat by the powerful agency of the Northcliffe press. There were twenty-three members of the Cabinet. One morning the streets were placarded with the posters of the Northcliffe evening journal bearing the legend “Wanted! Twenty-Three Ropes”.

Within the Government itself there were also many searchings of heart. The main object of the attack was the Prime Minister. Some of his colleagues were beginning to be dissatisfied with his leadership. On November 26th Lord Derby told Haig that “the political situation was serious, that a large section of the Government were deter-

<sup>1</sup>The Right Honourable E. S. Montagu, Minister for Munitions.

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mined that things could not go on as they were but that more energetic action must be taken”.

It was, in fact, a pause in the struggle—a breathing space between the rounds. Both sides were gasping from the blows given and received at Verdun and on the Somme. It was a critical moment, for a sign of weakness now might well prove fatal, and closely did the audience scan the demeanour of the two protagonists in their opposite corners of the ring. Germany proposed peace. In England there were some who were in favour of discussing it. Lloyd George told Haig that “Lord Lansdowne” (then a member of the Cabinet) “had written a terrible paper urging that we should make peace now, if the naval, military, financial and other heads of departments could not be certain of victory by next autumn.”

This paper, which, after Lord Lansdowne had left the Government, was published in the form of a letter to the *Daily Telegraph*, indicated the direction in which many people’s minds were travelling. Lord Lansdowne was a statesman of great distinction and of long experience. It seemed to him and to others, after two years of war, that complete victory for either side was improbable and that, if it were bound to end in a patched up peace and a compromise, why should the useless slaughter be prolonged for one unnecessary day?

Others took a more confident view. Robertson on being requested by the Government to give his opinion as to the possibility of a “knock out blow” prefaced the memorandum which he submitted by writing, “Quite frankly, and at the same time quite respectfully, I can only say I am surprised that the question should be asked. The idea had not before entered my head that any member of His Majesty’s Government had a doubt on the matter.”

Lloyd George, though he did not feel too sure about the



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Somme and though he may have questioned the possibility of defeating the German Army, never doubted the ability of the Allies to win the war. Northcliffe was equally confident and refused to publish Lord Lansdowne's letter in the columns of *The Times*. These two men, Lloyd George and Northcliffe, were now working together and were powerfully supported by Sir Edward Carson and the *Morning Post*. During the days that Haig was in London those machinations were busily in progress which were to bring about the fall of Asquith at the beginning of the following month. Apart from the hint that had been dropped by Lord Derby, Haig knew nothing of what was taking place, nor when the great change occurred does his diary contain any direct reference to it. To his wife he wrote on December 6th, "You seem to have great excitement at home making a new Government. I am personally very sorry for poor old Asquith. He has had a hard time and seems to have more capacity and brain power than any of the others."

The best feature of the new Government from Haig's point of view was the appointment of Lord Derby to be Secretary of State for War. The two were already close friends and were to remain so until the end. Nor is there any proof that at this period he contemplated his relationship with the new Prime Minister with apprehension. We have seen that his first impression of Lloyd George had not been altogether favourable, and it is obvious that Lloyd George's remarkable qualities were not of the sort most likely to stir the admiration or inspire the confidence of Haig. But their relations hitherto had been perfectly friendly and Haig seems now to have made a conscious effort to improve them.

The historian and philosopher, F. S. Oliver, though neither a soldier nor a politician himself, had, as is well known, a deep regard and respect for both those profes-

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sions. He was, at this time, much perturbed in his mind concerning the danger which he rightly believed to exist, of mutual suspicion between soldiers and politicians producing results which might prove disastrous to the allied cause. He did not know Haig at this time although, as will be seen, he came to know him later, and he therefore wrote to Lady Haig, who forwarded the letter to her husband. He replied, "I never thanked you for sending on Oliver's letter to me to read. I know him well by what Johnnie Gough used to say of him. He had a tremendously high opinion of him. He writes a very nice letter, and I think you sent him a most suitable reply. I get on very well with Lloyd George and yesterday he began to explain to me regarding his conversation with Foch which I noted in my diary. I would not let him go on with his explanation, but merely said I had never paid the smallest attention to it. And I told him that he might rely on me to do my utmost to help him. He used Oliver's words about some people trying to 'drive a wedge in between him and the soldiers'. So he seems quite alive to the danger. On the other hand he complained that the General Staff at the War Office don't let him know *everything* but only feed him with what *they think* is suitable for him to know. That of course is quite wrong and I'll mention it to Robertson who is staying here to-night."

Early in the following month he sent Lloyd George a spontaneous invitation to visit him at G.H.Q. Although the visit did not materialise Lloyd George welcomed the civility and, according to Robertson, was extremely pleased. When they met in Paris on November 16th they went for a walk together between the two meetings of the conference, and Haig describes Lloyd George as being "in very good form" at dinner.

On the 2nd of December there is this entry in the diary,

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“General Furse (commanding 9th Division) came to breakfast on his way to England to take up the appointment of Master-General of the Ordnance vice Von Donop. I had a talk with him afterwards and advised him to do his utmost to help Lloyd George as Secretary of State for War, because he was really in earnest to win the war. Furse is rather apt to be ‘agin the Government’ always, so I thought a word of friendly advice on my part would be helpful.”

On the last day of the year Haig dined with Lord Esher in Paris and the character of the new Prime Minister came up for discussion. Lord Esher thought him “a dangerous experiment” and asked “would you trust him to bring up your daughters or do any business for you?” to which Haig replied that he would not have chosen Mr. Asquith nor many of his predecessors, Disraeli, for instance, to bring up his children, but that they had none the less made satisfactory Prime Ministers.

These items of evidence, inconsiderable as they are, taken together do indicate that at this time Haig, though regretting Asquith, received his successor in no spirit of hostility, that he recognised his energy, welcomed his will to conquer and was prepared to collaborate to the best of his ability.

Asquith was not the only veteran to whom this month of December brought unwelcome repose. Resentment at Joffre’s dictatorial methods had been growing in Paris for many months and at last secured his dismissal. M. Briand re-formed his Government on December 12th, and General Lyautey became the new Minister for War. Haig therefore had to make two important new acquaintances.

His first impressions of General Nivelle, Joffre’s successor, were entirely favourable. They met at Cassel on December 20th. “We had a good talk for nearly two hours. He was, I thought, a most straightforward and soldierly man. . . . As regards operations, Nivelle stated that he was unable to

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accept the plans which had been worked out for the French armies under Joffre's directions. He is confident of breaking through the enemy's front, now that the enemy's morale is weakened, but the blow must be struck by surprise, and go through in 24 hours. This necessity for surprise, after all, is our own conclusion. Our objective on the Somme was the relief of Verdun and to wear out the enemy's forces with a view to striking the decisive blow later, when the enemy's reserves are used up. Altogether I was pleased with my first meeting with Nivelle. He is in his 61st year, is alert in mind and has had much practical experience in this war as a gunner, then in turn a divisional, corps and lastly army commander. He is to write to me his views. Nivelle also mentioned that Lloyd George had said to him at Verdun that 'the British are not a military people'. I said L.G. had never studied our military history."

A few days later he wrote, "I am sorry for poor old Joffre, but from what I have seen of Nivelle up to date I think he is the more energetic man."

From Joffre he received the following letter:

"My dear General,

It is with profound regret that I relinquish the command of the French Armies and that I cease to be your immediate collaborator.

"I shall always remember with great pleasure our very agreeable and cordial relations. I had long appreciated in you the character of a loyal comrade and I take with me a memory fraught with emotion (*un souvenir ému*) of you and of your subordinates.

"Be my interpreter to all the officers and men of the British Army in France. I shall always remain proud of having commanded at their side and I shall look forward to the success which with such troops you are certain shortly to achieve."

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The month which had witnessed the downfall of so many brought to Haig the last and the highest promotion to which a British soldier can aspire. On the 27th the King wrote to him in his own hand.

“Buckingham Palace,  
Dec. 27th, 1916.

“My dear Haig,

It gives me great pleasure and satisfaction to tell you that I have decided to appoint you a Field Marshal in my Army. By your conspicuous services you have fully merited this great position. I know this will be welcomed by the whole Army in France, whose confidence you have won.

“I hope you will look upon it as a New Year’s gift from myself and the country.

Believe me,

Very sincerely yours,

George R.I.”

The last day of the year 1916 was a busy one for Haig. In the morning he and Kiggell drove to Chantilly where they had an interview with Nivelle. “I began the discussion, and stated:

“(1) That I was in agreement with his *principles of action*. These in fact were the same as I had suggested to Joffre a year ago for the British operations.

“(2) That I believed he would be successful, but it is possible that he might not get as far as he hoped. The enemy would have a complete railway system while we must expect to have to repair our lines as we advanced. In the event of being held up, a rapid decision was required, and every effort must be made to pierce the enemy’s front in the north. In this case could I rely on the French Army to take over sufficient of the British front to set free the necessary

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number of British divisions to ensure success. He said, certainly, that that was his firm intention.

“(3) I then told him what we could do now in the way of relieving his troops. We begin on 15th January and finish near the Amiens-Villers-Bretonneux road early in February. What I could do after that much depended on the number of extra divisions sent me.

“He told me in conversation afterwards that the end of March or beginning of April would be sufficiently soon for his purposes to finish the relief up to the Amiens-Roye road.

“We then lunched with him. A large midday meal. I left for Paris at 1.30. I was quite favourably impressed with Nivelle.

“At 3 p.m. I attended at the Ministry of War by appointment, and was at once received by General Lyautey, who has come from Morocco within the last few days. He began by explaining how little he knew of the situation, that he felt his was a great responsibility and that he looked to me to help and advise him. I had great experience, was much respected, etc., etc. He then explained that Nivelle would have an entirely free hand as Commander-in-Chief of the French armies in France.

“After referring to the formation of an Allied Council for the direction of the war which he regarded as impracticable, he said he proposed to form a section of the ‘T.O.E.’ (théâtres des opérations étrangères)<sup>1</sup> in Paris to give him information. Did I agree? I said I saw no objection. It would give him knowledge and power, but he must be careful not to allow secrets to escape through its members.

<sup>1</sup>This department was set up at Joffre’s headquarters in December 1915 as part of the arrangement by which he exercised supreme command over all French armies in the field. Nivelle, unlike Joffre, held command over the forces on the western front only.

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“We then discussed Salonika. I was very firm in my opinion that as many troops (French and British) as possible should be withdrawn from that theatre without delay. He said all the authorities on the spot said it was too late to withdraw. But Requin<sup>1</sup> was next door, would I see him along with him (Lyautey) now? I agreed and Requin came in and gave his opinion, all in favour of remaining *for political reasons*. I was very frank. Said I had a great opinion of Requin and he had rendered splendid service in the war especially at Ypres in 1914, but if his advice were now accepted, success on the western front would be prejudiced. There is only one decision which will ensure our success in the war, and that is to withdraw as many divisions to France in as short a time as possible. I saw Lyautey agreed with me, but he said he ‘would give the greatest attention to my opinion, but of course it would not be proper for him to give a decision at once on so important a problem’. I was with him for two full hours. He is about sixty<sup>2</sup>—smokes continually and seems a nervous highly strung man and is working long hours. Requin told me he was with Lyautey at 2 a.m. to-day and another officer began work again at 7 a.m. He is slightly deaf in his left ear. I was much taken with Lyautey. An active-minded man, with, I should say, much determination, and a gentleman.”

After leaving Lyautey, Haig called on the British Ambassador, Lord Bertie, who had various matters which he wished to discuss. After dinner with Lord Esher, to which reference has already been made, he sat down before going to bed to write to Robertson an account of the long day's work.

<sup>1</sup>Commandant Requin had been liaison officer with Haig's I Corps at Ypres in 1914. He was now on Lyautey's personal staff at the Ministry of War.

<sup>2</sup>He was actually sixty-three.

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Henceforward two facts were to exercise an unhappy influence over the remaining stages of the war. The Prime Minister of England had, from now on, no confidence in his own Commander-in-Chief, and he disbelieved in the main strategic principle upon which the Governments of France and England had decided and to which, in spite of him, they were to adhere. Whether in any circumstances a Prime Minister can be justified in retaining during the crisis of a great war a Commander-in-Chief whom he considers unfit for the position, and whether a Prime Minister should not resign rather than be a party to the sacrifice of human life owing to the pursuance of plans which he firmly believes to be disastrous, are questions which may engage the attention of students of political morality. But it must be remembered, in Mr. Lloyd George's defence, that he undoubtedly would have got rid of his Commander-in-Chief if he could, and that he spared no effort from the beginning of his premiership until the end to divert the energies of the Allies into different channels. The excuses which he has subsequently put forward for not dismissing Haig are two. The first is that although he was a bad general, the whole British Empire could not produce a better.<sup>1</sup> Such an admission of imperial bankruptcy can hardly be taken seriously, and will therefore be accepted by Haig's admirers as a handsome tribute. The second excuse, and the more convincing, is that although he wanted to get rid of Haig, his Cabinet colleagues, the press and public opinion, prevented him from doing so.<sup>2</sup> He himself has never lacked courage, and if the storm was one that he

<sup>1</sup> *War Memories*, vol. iv, page 2267.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2271. The writer says, however, in another passage (p. 2223) that if both Haig and Robertson had disappeared "there would have been a sense of relief amongst all the fighting men from one end of the line to the other".



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dared not face we may be sure that it would have proved something more than a squall. The truth is that, for some curious reason which he cannot explain, the people of Great Britain, who are not always lacking in sagacity, had greater faith in the stupid soldier than in the clever politician.

Much of the deplorable bitterness which pervades the pages of his *War Memories* may be attributed to the fact that, although the war was won within the period of his premiership, the strategy which he advocated was never adopted, and the Commander-in-Chief whom he distrusted was never displaced. He must therefore be at pains to show that it might have been much more easily won by other means and under other leaders, and that the vast edifice of the German Empire might have been dashed to the ground without the fearful sacrifices that were demanded from the Allies.

As has already been explained, the Battle of the Somme produced two schools of thought, one who believed that it had been justified by its achievement and another who feared it had achieved nothing at all. In this latter school there were again two subdivisions, one holding that the sooner a peace was patched up the better and the other believing that there must be some other way to win the war. To the latter, more robust school of thought, Lloyd George belonged, and on assuming his new responsibilities he forthwith devoted his remarkable energy to discovering what that way might be.

As has already been seen, a simple but ingenious theory had been developed in the brains of abstract strategists since the beginning of the war. Set forth by its adherents with eloquence and plausibility it became more convincing every month that the indecisive contest on the western front continued. Briefly it was as follows: It is an axiom of strategy that the surest way to defeat your enemy is to turn

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his flank. The flanks of Germany could not be turned in the west because they were defended on the one side by the North Sea and on the other by the Swiss Alps. Therefore the Allies must go farther east and by attacking from Italy, in the Balkans or through the Dardanelles, effectually accomplish that flanking movement upon which alone success must depend.

Presented on the dinner table with mustard pot and salt cellar as objectives, the argument was unanswerable. But these theorists without experience of the field forgot that in practice the object of outflanking is to compel the enemy either to retreat or to give battle at a disadvantage with a vulnerable flank exposed. No success, however, in the east could induce the German Army in the west to yield a yard, and every soldier sent by the Allies to the east increased the danger of a successful advance by the German Army in the west. If all the campaigns in the Balkans and in Italy had succeeded, if Turkey had been defeated and Austria had surrendered, the strategic situation of the German Army, wedged between Switzerland and the sea, would not have been affected. The Allies could hardly have concentrated a sufficient force north of the Brenner Pass to offer a serious menace to the southern frontier of Germany.<sup>1</sup>

This argument does not, of course, apply to the attack upon the Dardanelles. If that Dardanelles campaign had succeeded in 1915 the effect would certainly have been prodigious, both by its influence on enemy and neutral

<sup>1</sup>The following extract from an article that recently appeared in a German publication is interesting in this connection: "The fact that in the end, wherever else was selected, the foe would have to be beaten and there would be hard fighting everywhere, belongs to the category of things that Lloyd George would not and did not want to see. Nor would he believe that the Germans, being on interior lines, could appear very quickly in any new theatre which he might choose." *Militär Wochenblatt*, No. 30, 1935.

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psychology and by enabling the Allies of the west to join hands with Russia. But by the beginning of 1917 the Gallipoli peninsula had long been abandoned, and the days of Russia as a factor in the war were already numbered.

Lloyd George had never been an enthusiastic supporter of the Gallipoli expedition and had always been more inclined to favour the campaign in the Balkans. Soon after assuming his new role, however, he appears to have altered his opinion, for on December 12th Robertson wrote to Haig, "Our new P.M. is well on the move. He is at last convinced that Salonika is wrong and is going to tell Briand so next week. . . . Though he is off Salonika he is *on* Egypt, and wants to get to Jerusalem. For this he is hankering after two divisions from France for the winter. He is also after lending some of your big guns to Italy for the winter. I've done my best with him and in company with you I've no doubt we can keep him all right. I want him to get the division from Salonika but that will be difficult and opposed by all the Allies."

The French Government, however, were stronger in support of the Balkan campaign than anyone in England. Their one political general, Sarrail, was in command there and the whole matter had for them a special political importance. On the 28th of December Robertson wrote again, "During the last few days I have had the worst time of a very bad year, chiefly because of the French pressing us to send two more divisions to Salonika. M. Ribot and M. Thomas have been here on behalf of the French Government urging us to send these divisions. The strategical factors are well known to you and me and I need not repeat them. The French themselves recognise these factors, but in order to save their own political position are prepared to go to any desperate lengths no matter how futile they may be. Their present fear is that the Germans contemplate a

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heavy attack on Macedonia, that they will join hands with Greece, and will turn us out of Monastir and so lead to the Serbians throwing up the game. This would mean the downfall of the French Ministry I have no doubt, and that that is what is bothering the French Ministers I have equally no doubt.

“I need not trouble you with all the talk that has taken place but will merely say that the result is that so far I have persuaded our Government not to consent to the French proposal. At the same time some of our War Cabinet think that the Italians should be pressed to send divisions—though of course they would be of no more use than ours—and in return for this they are inclined to think we should lend or give the Italians more heavy artillery. You heard about this from the Prime Minister when you were here. The question of this artillery has not yet been considered and I have some rather important figures to put in front of the Cabinet when they discuss it.

“Although I have managed to stave off the proposal for the time being we are suggesting to the French Government that we, they and the Italians should have a conference some time next week in the south of France to discuss not only Salonika but the whole of the operations for the forthcoming year. The French representatives did not seem to like the idea, but the Prime Minister says that if they do not take part in the conference then he and I will go to Italy.”

On the 1st of January Haig left Paris early in the morning and called on Nivelles at Chantilly in order to tell him of the result of his interview with Lyautey the day before. “He had already heard by telephone from General Lyautey himself that he was much pleased at my visit and he was in full agreement with my views regarding a withdrawal from Salonika, but he doubts if the political members of the French Government would agree to it.”

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On the way back to his own headquarters he visited at Clermont General Franchet d'Esperey, who had succeeded Foch in command of the northern group of French Armies. For Foch, also, was under a cloud these days and, the reputation of ill health having been given as an excuse, he had been relegated to a position of comparative inactivity at Senlis. Of Franchet d'Esperey, by whose side he had fought on the Aisne in September 1914, Haig wrote, "He is a clear-headed, determined little man, and hitherto I have got on very well with him."

The proposed conference in the south of France referred to in Robertson's letter did not come about, and Robertson accompanied Lloyd George to Rome. At the inter-allied conference which took place there Lloyd George successfully resisted Briand's eloquent plea for two further divisions to be sent to Salonika. He was not, however, so successful in gaining acceptance of his own proposal for a combined offensive against Austria. Even the Italian General, Cadorna, could hardly be persuaded to support it, and Lloyd George remained convinced that a great opportunity was missed on this occasion. There is no more endless nor less satisfactory occupation for the human mind than to speculate upon what might have taken place if circumstances had been different. In this particular connection, however, it should be remembered that such a combined operation upon Italian soil would presumably have been under the supreme command of an Italian general. When the great disaster of Caporetto ensued in the same year, Lloyd George was one of the first to attribute it to the insufficiency of the Italian High Command, to that very Command, in fact, to which he had been so anxious a few months earlier to hand over the conduct of a vast inter-allied operation for which he would have endangered the solidarity of the western front.

Haig was on leave in England when Lloyd George passed

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through France on his return journey. Robertson therefore arranged that he should have a conversation with Kiggell, who wrote to Haig the following account of the interview. ". . . Lloyd George began talking about the merits of the relative fronts—taking the line that we only thought of our own side; that we had not really effected much there and he did not believe we could; that we must strike against a soft front and could not find it in the west; that much of the Somme loss was useless and the country would not stand more of that sort of thing; and so on. In fact he poured out a lot of heretical, amateur strategy of the most dangerous and misleading kind and was far from complimentary to what had been done by our armies here. He ruffled me so thoroughly that I argued vehemently with him and I fear without displaying the respect due to his high office. I told him he had better make peace at once if England was going to take up the line that heavy losses could not be allowed, and that everything he sent to other theatres before we had all we wanted would reduce our chance of winning the war. Altogether the argument was decidedly heated, and I don't suppose it had the least effect in converting him. Robertson threw in a contribution now and then backing me up, but said little. Afterwards he told me privately that he had to meet that sort of stuff all day and every day, and was doing his best against it though he feared we thought he could do more than he could. He thought my vehemence would do more good than harm. I hope so. No doubt L.G. will consider me a rude and contumacious fellow and I gave him good grounds! but that does not matter if any of it got home. Robertson's line I gather is to delay the commission of serious mistakes and try to fill us up with all we want before the P.M. succeeds in sending things elsewhere."

But a more eloquent advocate of an offensive on the

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western front now appeared upon the scene. Nivelle, the new French Commander-in-Chief, had much to recommend him to a statesman like Lloyd George, who had always had something of the rebel's contempt for the rules of precedence and something of the self-made man's admiration for self-confidence in others. Nivelle had begun the war as a colonel and distinguished himself from the first. Recently, before Verdun, he had been responsible for the sensational recapture of Fort Douaumont. His staff had the passionate faith in his genius which great leaders should inspire. He himself was confident that he could repeat on a large scale what he had accomplished on a small one, and that he could defeat the German Army in forty-eight hours. His appearance was prepossessing, he was eloquent and he spoke English fluently.

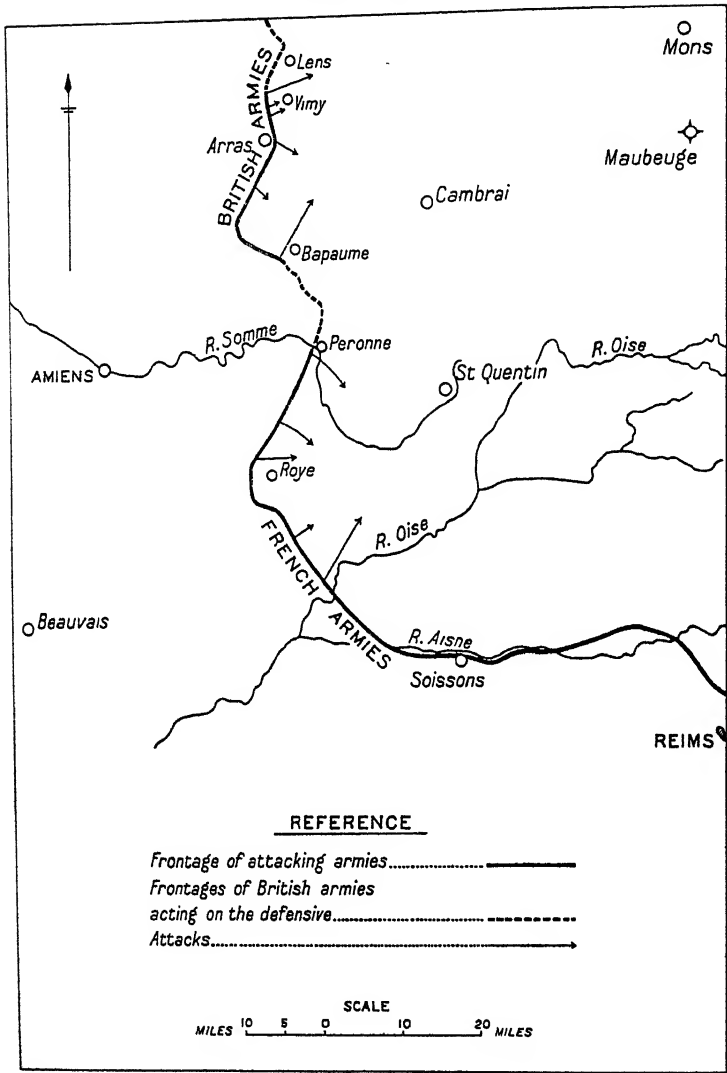
Nivelle had taken over his new command on December 17th. He met Haig for the first time on December 20th. Their interview has already been described (see page 12) and on December 21st he wrote, stating his plan of campaign in clear and definite language. Haig and Joffre had already, as has been seen, decided upon a simultaneous attack at the earliest possible moment, the English attacking from Vimy to Bapaume and the French through the valleys of the Oise and Somme, whilst the gap between the two was to remain on the defensive.

The main feature of Nivelle's alteration in this plan was the formation of a striking force—(*une masse de manœuvre*). This force was to consist of three armies, and in order to ensure unity of command it was to be entirely French. The offensives upon which Haig and Joffre had agreed were still to take place but on a smaller scale, and they were now to become merely preliminaries to the main attack, which was to be delivered by this striking force and was to carry all before it.





OFFENSIVE AGREED UPON BY  
 JOFFRE AND HAIG  
 FOR 1917



MAP I.

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This main attack was not to be delivered simultaneously with, but subsequent to, the attacks by the British and by the northern group of French armies. A glance at the map will show how there existed at this time a vast bulge in the front line of the enemy. It was Nivelle's plan, having attacked this bulge from a westerly to an easterly direction as a preliminary, to deliver the main attack from a southerly to a northerly direction in the district of the River Aisne. The British attack was to be limited in the north by Arras and therefore not to extend to the Vimy ridge. This was the only detail with regard to which Haig was unwilling to comply with Nivelle's proposals.

So far as the continually postponed northern offensive near the coast was concerned, Nivelle argued that if his attack was successful it would become unnecessary, since the German armies would be compelled to withdraw from the Channel ports of their own volition. If, on the other hand, his attack failed it would still be possible to deliver the attack in the north at the most suitable season of the year.

Haig had replied to Nivelle's letter on Christmas Day. "I agree in principle with your proposals and am desirous of doing all that I can to help you on the lines you suggest. The extent to which I can help, however, depends upon the number of divisions sent to me within the next two or three months from Salonika and elsewhere, and at present I have no definite information on this point. . . . In the meantime all that I can undertake is to relieve your troops as far as the Amiens-Villers-Bretonneux-St. Quentin road commencing on the 1st February. I regret that I cannot possibly commence the relief at an earlier date than that."

Yielding, however, to pressing entreaties from Nivelle, Haig subsequently agreed to begin the relief of French troops north of the Somme on January 15th, and to speed up its continuance as much as possible.

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There were to be three phases of the battle as Nivelle saw it. First the attacks by the British Army and French northern group of armies. Secondly the break through by the French "masse de manoeuvre". Thirdly the exploitation of the break through by all troops available.

Commenting in his diary on the letter in which Nivelle thus outlined the sequence of events, Haig wrote, "But he omits all reference to the possible fourth phase, if the French decisive attack does not achieve the success anticipated. In this case it was agreed verbally between us that he would relieve sufficient British troops to form an attacking force for action on the British front somewhere north of the Lys."

This view he set forth at length in a letter which he addressed to Nivelle on January 6th (see appendix B). Nivelle's reply to this letter reached Haig when he was on leave in England. He was staying at a house which had been lent him by Lady Linlithgow at Ascot when on January 13th, "about half an hour after midnight last night a loud rapping at the front door woke up the house. This was a messenger from the War Office with a letter from General Nivelle dated 11th instant. The letter is in reply to one I sent him.

"We are agreed on nearly every point. The third phase will not be started unless the second is successful. The difficulty seems to me to be able to come to a decision that the first and second phases have been sufficiently successful to justify the starting of the third phase. Both the British and French are affected by that decision, as it will mean the abandonment of the northern operations if the third phase is started. In other words, we fix all our faith on these operations being so successful that the Belgian coast will be cleared indirectly.

"Telegram received from Robertson that Prime Minis-

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ter will see me at 11 a.m. on Monday and meeting with General Nivelle will be at noon on Monday. Secrett<sup>1</sup> having gone on his holiday, Doris and I are anxious whether I shall have any uniform at the flat to wear on Monday.”

At their meeting on Monday morning Lloyd George repeated much of what he had said to Kiggell, comparing the British Army unfavourably to the French, criticising the tactics on the Somme and assuring Haig that the country would not stand a repetition of it. Haig listened patiently and then defended to the best of his ability the British Army on the charges made against it, reminding the Prime Minister that the Somme battle had been undertaken and continued in order to relieve the pressure on the French at Verdun.

In the afternoon he returned to Downing Street. “There was a short meeting of the War Committee first of all, at which I and General Robertson were present, also Mr. Balfour (Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs). The War Committee consists of

Mr. Lloyd George	Prime Minister.
Lord Milner	without office.
Lord Curzon	without office.
Mr. Henderson	in charge of Labour.
Mr. Bonar Law	in charge of House of Commons.

“I explained the length of front held by the British as compared with that of the French, and the number of enemy divisions opposite each of us. I also pointed to the small extent of country between our front and the sea, so that we cannot risk being pressed back.

“At 3.30 General Nivelle arrived accompanied by the French Ambassador and four staff officers, including aides-de-camp. Nivelle explained his plans at some length and

<sup>1</sup>Haig's soldier servant.

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said he must have his troops relieved as far as the Amiens-Roye road in order to have the requisite number of troops set free for the attacks which he contemplated making with the French divisions. He also wished the date of the attack to be fixed for 15th February, or as soon after as possible.

“A great deal of French military methods and arrangements were discussed by our civilian war committee and Nivelles without getting much nearer to a decision. I explained that I, after careful consideration, had come to the conclusion that I could not hold my present defensive front as far as 3,000 yards south of the Villers-Bretonneux road with less than 27 divisions, and that 35 divisions were required for the offensive, in accordance with my agreement with General Nivelles. In order to go to the Roye road, four to five more divisions were wanted. These must either be sent from England, or I must reduce the strength of my attack. It must also be taken into consideration that the training of my troops will suffer, a very serious consideration. Success depends very largely on the efficient training of the troops who are detailed to attack.”

The next morning, “At 11 a.m. the War Committee assembled with Robertson and myself. The Prime Minister said that last night the War Cabinet had considered by themselves the two questions now before us. They felt that we must agree to take over to the Roye road for the following reasons:

“(1) We had refused to send more divisions to Salonika, though strongly pressed by the French Government.

“(2) We were fighting in France and the C.-in-C. of the French Army had elaborated a plan which we must do our utmost to make successful.

“(3) The French Army was the largest force.

“We must also agree to the date which the French wished. Their country was invaded, and they wished to clear the

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enemy out as soon as possible. Lastly, by attacking early the British would be able, if the attack by the French failed, to launch another attack later in the year at some point further north.

“At 11.30 General Nivelle and the other French officers arrived. . . . He was questioned by various members of the War Committee as to the French method of holding their line, and in reply gave a regular lecture on how he thought it ought to be done, and hinted that the British line was being held too strongly. I was able to tell the Committee that in one sector four British divisions had recently relieved five and a half French divisions. Also that the British sector covering Calais and Boulogne is necessarily held more strongly than any sector in the Vosges.

“About 12.30 the British members of the conference withdrew and had a private discussion in an adjoining room. The Prime Minister then repeated to us what he had said earlier in the morning, that the Government felt that we must give way. The question of how to find the extra divisions to enable me to extend my right was now discussed. What divisions could be sent out from England? The question of the extra risk of invasion, if more divisions left England, was discussed between Prime Minister and the C.I.G.S. It was then arranged to send me two more divisions, i.e. that I should have 64 divisions instead of 62, and that I should, by making other dispositions, extend the extra distance *by the first week in March*.

“As we left the conference room, General Nivelle handed me a draft in French of the conclusions which he wished the conference to arrive at. I translated this to the War Committee and we were able to agree to it except that the first week in March was substituted for 15th February for the extensions of my right in relief of French troops. The date of the attack was left at not later than 1st April.

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"I must say that these conclusions were hastily considered by the War Committee.

"We then returned to the conference room, the Prime Minister then announced the Cabinet's decision, and said they accepted Nivelle's conclusions modified as given above. The latter were then signed by Nivelle, Robertson and myself.

"Nivelle seemed very pleased at the results and made some valedictory remarks. The conference then broke up. The Prime Minister personally thanked me for the ready way in which I had done my best to help the Government out of a great difficulty with the French Government. It was past one o'clock."

The result of Nivelle's visit to London had been to increase considerably the British Government's enthusiasm for his proposals. Robertson wrote to Haig on January 19th: "Until Nivelle arrived in London the Prime Minister in particular and the Cabinet in general were frightfully anxious that you should not go off until you were fully ready and all the Allies ready too. More than once he has expressed alarm lest you should go off prematurely. Nivelle's appearance has caused an entire change and on several occasions since you attended the conference the Prime Minister and Lord Curzon have emphasised the importance of your going off as soon as possible. . . .

"I cannot follow what the Prime Minister has now got in his mind but he seems to have an idea that you and Nivelle are going to do something very effective in the course of three weeks, although he has always hitherto told me that he doubted if we would ever be able to do anything useful on the western front."

The fact was that Nivelle had proved the first and the last person capable of persuading Lloyd George that victory could be won on the western front. Lloyd George, believ-

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ing for the nonce that the thing could be done, demanded that it should be done quickly.

At this moment there occurred, most unfortunately, a crisis in the railway situation. It had never been satisfactory and now, owing to the canals being frozen and Paris and the munition works being therefore compelled to rely entirely upon the railways for their coal supply, the situation had become serious. The details have lost their interest, but it is of importance to record that throughout this wearisome but, at the time, vitally important business Haig never ceased to work in complete agreement with Geddes, the civilian who had been sent out to France by the Government, and also that it led to no difficulties, as it easily might have done, between Haig and Nivelle. For this reason, and others, it is worth quoting Haig's own account of this, his first stay at Nivelle's headquarters.

"I left Beaurepaire at 8.45 and arrived at Beauvais about noon. General Nivelle has allotted Château de Frocourt to me. It is about 6 kilometres from Beauvais in the direction of Paris.

"Generals Kiggell, Geddes and Davidson accompanied me. We lunched with General Nivelle. M. Claveille (Minister of Communications), Generals Ragueneau and Pont were present, as well as the usual staff. The lunch was limited to three courses, a dish of eggs followed by one meat and a sweet. I was glad of this; there was also a reduction in the number of wines.

"I sat between Nivelle and Ragueneau. The latter did not wish that the French and British technical railway men should work together. Nivelle agreed with me that closer touch between the technical personnel was essential to secure better working.

"I walked with Claveille to the office after lunch, and made the suggestion that our technical railway men should



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be in touch with the French working staff. He quite agreed as to the necessity for the change.

"Immediately after lunch we discussed the situation. Geddes had prepared a statement of our case as I wanted. It showed that we must have 200,000 tons carried weekly. I explained it to the conference. The discussion was most friendly, both sides being anxious to do their best. The main difficulty is lack of labour. I put some questions to the French (1) Can you carry for us 200,000 tons per week, and (2) When will the doubling of the lines be finished? It was agreed to give us 200,000 tons per week. It was not possible to say when the doubling of the lines will be finished. So it was agreed to appoint a French engineer who would go round and see what was being done and report to both the French and myself as to the progress made. We can then allot the available men for work to best advantage. As to traffic, the two civil technical staffs (French and British) are to work together but we are not in any way to become responsible for the working of the Nord railway system. This conference ended very satisfactorily, and Geddes went off with Claveille and General Ragueneau to work out the necessary details to give effect to the principle which had been agreed between us. I then had a talk with General Nivelles over our respective operations. He has now decided to put in his second attack only 2 or 3 days after our first attack commences.

"General Nivelles asked me to take steps to knock out any German long-range guns which might threaten Noeux-les-Mines and Bruay. I said we had already taken steps to deal with them. The French Government also wished him to ask me for the assistance of 2 divisions to dig a line south of the Aisne at some 40 kilometres from Paris to defend the city against long-range gun fire. I replied that there was so much important work connected with our offensive that it was



SIR WILLIAM ORPEN'S PORTRAIT OF HAIG,  
PAINTED AT G.H.Q., IN MAY 1917  
*Imperial War Museum photograph. Copyright Reserved*



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not possible for me to spare a single man. Nivelles fully agreed with me and we parted quite satisfied with our discussion. General Nivelles had taken a personal interest in getting me a comfortable house near his headquarters. The Château de Frocourt is a well-built brick house, old, but well kept up. It is nicely warmed. The French sent a cook, an elderly orderly or two to work in the house, and a guard. Everything was most comfortably arranged.

The flow of distinguished visitors to Haig's headquarters continued. "Mr. John Masefield came to lunch. He is a poet, but I am told that he has written the best account of the landing at Gallipoli." (Poets, the descendants of Homer, who also wrote accounts of fighting near Gallipoli, will smile a little sadly at the conjunctive "but".) "Now he wishes to write about the deeds of our men in the Battle of the Somme. To this I readily gave permission and said I would gladly put him in the way of those most concerned with the various actions, so that he could get first hand information."

On another occasion, "Mr. Bernard Shaw (the author and playwright) came to lunch. An interesting man of original views. A great talker! On sitting down to lunch I at once discovered he was a vegetarian. As if by magic, on my ordering it, two poached eggs appeared, also some spinach and macaroni, so he did not fare badly."

Mr. Belloc is described as "an English M.P., but very French in appearance. A most interesting and well informed man."

It was not, however, only English journalists and men of letters whom he felt it his duty to receive; representatives of the French press were also often admitted, and in this connection an incident occurred which, although insignificant in itself, provided Haig with an intimation of the extent of the animosity with which he was regarded in cer-

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tain quarters, and of the nature of the tactics which would be resorted to in order to secure his undoing. Anything that journalists desired to report of what he had said to them would in the natural course of events be submitted for his approval before receiving publication. On this occasion, however, owing to an oversight on the part of a subordinate, a report of an interview appeared in certain French newspapers without his knowledge or approval. The article, in fact, contained no sentiment with which he disagreed, but the somewhat over self-confident language in which it was couched would have come more naturally from the mouth of a Gascon than from that of a Scotsman. He was represented as having prophesied that the war would end in the year 1917, but in any case there must be no peace without victory, and also as having boasted of all that Great Britain was doing for the cause.

His own first irritation on reading a translation of the interview which appeared in *The Times* is recorded in his diary: "London papers to-day published an alleged interview between myself and some French journalists. *The Times* gave a translation of the statement, and also published a leading article approving my statements in highest terms. As a matter of fact, I give no 'interviews', but from time to time I have received eminent French journalists who have visited our front. On these occasions I merely talked platitudes and stated my confidence in a victorious termination of the war. By some mistake a summary of one of these talks has slipped past the Censor. I am much annoyed, as I hold that it is quite wrong for the Commander-in-Chief's views to be published in the press at all. The Government at home should give out all such reports."

But three days later, "Telegram from Lord Derby regarding the 'interview' which I am supposed to have given

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some French correspondents. A question is now being asked in the House of Commons on Monday and he wants to know what should be said. I sent a wire stating that I had seen correspondents privately before they left the British area, that the various reports in the papers are their general recollections of a conversation between five persons and were in no case quotations. The reports were passed by the Censor as they contained nothing of any use to the enemy, and without my knowledge. Lytton, who went to Paris to find out the feeling there, returned and said that the papers and the public were delighted with what was published and have never been so friendly towards the British as they are now. They cannot understand why so much fuss is being made in England over it."

But the fuss in England continued, assiduously fostered by a small section of the press and a few Members of Parliament. In the House of Commons Philip Snowden, with characteristic intemperance of language, referred to the Commander-in-Chief's "blazing indiscretion" which, he said, "had shaken the confidence of many people in his judgment and common sense."

Haig sent Neville Lytton, who was then in charge of the press censorship at G.H.Q., to explain the whole matter to the Secretary of State. He was directed to attend a meeting of the War Cabinet and on his return gave the following account of what had taken place:

"He told me that Lloyd George and Lord Curzon were most hostile and cross-examined him as if he were trying to tell what was untrue! Mr. Balfour, on the other hand, supported me very warmly, and put the case in its true light. L.G. seemed to resent my bulking large in the public eye at all. He wishes to shine alone. As for Curzon, it seems that he still has a grudge against the soldier and would like to reintroduce a new system with a military member as at

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Simla. However, Mr. Bonar Law's statement in the House of Commons was well received, and the question is considered ended. The attacks seem to have been made by discredited socialists and 'peace at any price' people. What concerns me is the desire of certain people, including the Prime Minister, to make capital out of a trivial incident and to misrepresent the actual nature of the so-called interview in order to rouse public opinion against me, and then to order my recall."

Haig's final comment on the matter was contained in a letter to his wife. "I have glanced at Wednesday's papers and I see that Mr. Bonar Law did not read out my telegram to the House of Commons. On the other hand I am told he made a good impression and that the incident is closed. But that does not affect my mind. . . . Apparently it is to the interest of some people to make out that I said things which *you* (and most of my friends) know I would never have said. The interesting thing is to ascertain for whose benefit this reputed interview has been misrepresented. I heard that both Lloyd George and Curzon would have been glad to have dealt me a blow. Why I cannot think, but I am told that L.G. finds himself slipping down the hill in popular favour, and is looking about to find something to increase his reputation as the 'man of the hour' and the saviour of England. However, I am doing my best, and have a clear conscience. If they have someone else who can command this great Army better than I am doing, I shall be glad to hand over to him, and will be *so happy* to come back to my darling wife and play golf and bring up the children. It has not yet come to this. I merely mention it, so that you can see how independent in spirit I feel, and that whatever I do is what I feel and judge to be the best for the country."

The incident was closed, but it had left in Haig's mind

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the unpleasant impression that those in high places who should have been his firmest friends were watching him with eyes of eager malice, ready to detect the first false step which might enable them to sweep him for ever from their path.



## Chapter XVII

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Nivelles's new plan of attack had not from the first inspired confidence in Haig or Robertson. But they had been willing to co-operate to the best of their ability. They had realised that it was part of Nivelles's scheme that the glory of winning the war should belong to the French rather than to the British Army. But this, so long as the war was won, had been to them a matter of indifference. Haig wrote in his diary on February 7th, "We willingly play a second role to the French—that is we are to make a holding attack to draw in the enemy's reserves so as to make the task of the French easier. We shall at any rate have heavy losses, with the possibility of no showy successes, whereas the French are to make the decisive attack with every prospect of gaining the fruits of victory. I think it is for the general good that we play this role in support of the French, but let the future critics realise that we have adopted it with our eyes open as to the probable consequences." Haig's main fear was lest Nivelles's impetuosity should cause the attack to be delivered before adequate preparations had been made, and these preparations were being continually delayed owing to the breakdown of the French railways. He was, however, much reassured by an interview which he had with Nivelles on February 16th. The French General arrived at G.H.Q. in the afternoon together with Colonel d'Alençon, of whom Haig remarks

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that "he seems to have great influence with Nivelles, but unfortunately is very anti-British in feeling".

He goes on to record, "After tea Nivelles and I had a long talk. He said he preferred to talk with me alone rather than with staff officers present. Briefly, our discussion was most satisfactory. He was most frank. We discussed the railway situation. I explained our difficulties; how we are given only 70 trains a day when we require 200 to carry our minimum of material for the coming offensive.

"He at once sent a stiff wire to the French Government recommending that the Nord Railway Company be placed on a sound footing at once. As regards the date of attack, he fully realised that we are dependent on the railway, but he agreed with me that no attack should start until all our requirements had been provided. From the information which he had of the Chemin de Fer du Nord, he thought that we should not be delayed more than ten days beyond the original dates agreed upon. I said I would do my utmost to meet these views, but that my preparations depended on the amount delivered by the railways.

"I was much pleased with the results of our meeting, as I had feared that Nivelles wished to attack in any case, whether the British were ready or not. He seems now to be in complete agreement with me."

A few days later Lyautey paid Haig a visit. "General Lyautey (Minister of War) arrived in Fourth Army area this morning from Paris. He visited the battle front, lunched with Gough at headquarters Fifth Army, saw some schools, etc., and eventually motored to his train at Briemeaux station about 2 miles from here, and arrived about 7 p.m. for a talk with me before dinner. We also had a long talk after dinner. He spoke most frankly and said he felt quite at home with me and my staff, whereas he distrusted 'the politicians'. When he mounted the tribune to address

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the *Chambre des Députés* he pinched himself to make sure that it was really he who had to talk! He hated the whole thing so. At the War Cabinet meetings in Paris he sat next M. Poincaré (the President of the Republic). M. Ribot (finance) was on the right of the latter, while on the other side of the table was M. Briand (the Premier) with Admiral Lacaze on his right and M. Albert Thomas (in charge of Munitions) on his left. 'It usually happens that Briand and M. Poincaré get to lengthy discussions and weaken in the matter of taking decisive action.' Then Lyautey 'looks across to Thomas, and breaks into the discussion'. Thomas at once supports him and the matter is settled! Lyautey finds 'his greatest support in this little revolutionary socialist. He is the most patriotic of all the Cabinet and is determined to spare no effort in order to beat the Germans.

" . . . I found Lyautey most sound in his views and straightforward in his actions. He and Nivelle seem so far to be a great improvement on their predecessors."

It was therefore in this happy mood of refreshed confidence in his French colleagues that on the 26th of February Haig set forth for Calais in order to take part in a conference, which he had himself suggested, with the British Prime Minister and the French Commander-in-Chief, on the difficult problem of railway communications. What occurred there is best recounted in his own words.

"10.45 I left with General Geddes for Calais. He had compiled an excellent summary of the transportation case and the questions which we wished to be settled. We talked over this in the car and took a walk together on reaching Calais.

"About 1.15 p.m. the Prime Minister, General Robertson and party arrived from London. M. Briand with Generals Lyautey and Nivelle had already arrived.

"I sat next to L.G. at lunch. He agreed to see Geddes and

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me for a quarter of an hour before the conference on the matter of the railway transport question. As soon as he had finished lunch, however, he hurried off to see M. Briand in order, he said, to settle the programme of the meeting. He was closeted with Briand for over half an hour, and then sent word to say that he would go to the conference straight away without any preliminary talk with me and Geddes. No doubt, at the meeting with Briand, the procedure which was followed at the conference was decided upon.

“The conference was held in a small room downstairs in the Station Hotel. We sat:

General Ragueneau	General Lyautey (War)	Claveille (Minister of Transport)
Gen. Robertson Lloyd George		Briand
Gen. Geddes	D.H.	Gen. Nivelle

round the table as above, and the secretaries and interpreter (Manton) were adjoining.

“After a few general words from L.G. and Briand, Geddes was asked to give the several points in dispute. He explained our requirements in tonnage and in trains. Gen. Ragueneau and M. Claveille replied and the discussion then started upon points of technical detail. L.G. thereupon broke in and said that he thought that it would be better if the railway specialists withdrew and settled their differences together, whilst the more important question of ‘Plans’ was dealt with at once. For me this was quite a new and unexpected development. But doubtless this had all been planned by L.G. with Briand beforehand.

“The conference on transportation thus broke up after sitting for barely an hour.

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“Tea was then brought in, and after a few minutes the secret conference began with only the following present:

For England:	Lloyd George, Robertson, Haig.
For France:	Briand, Lyautey, Nivelle.
Interpreter:	M. Manton.

“General Nivelle with the aid of a map, at Lloyd George’s request, outlined his plan of operations. He started by saying that he took over command on 18th December and on 20th came to see Sir D.H. at Cassel, that I had ‘after reflection, concurred in his proposals and helped him in every way’, and on several occasions later in his address he emphasised the ‘accord’ which existed between us.

“The plan is the one which he had already on several occasions explained to Lloyd George and for which we are now preparing. So it is not necessary to give it again here. Nivelle concluded by saying that he would answer any questions L.G. cared to put to him. But L.G. said ‘that is not all—I want to hear everything’ and to Briand he said, ‘Tell him to keep nothing back’ and so forth ‘as to his disagreements with Marshal Haig’. This was quite a surprise to me, and apparently also to Nivelle to some extent, for he said there was only the one point on which questions had arisen between us, namely regarding my arrangements for the attack near Arras—and he then explained how he had suggested to me not to extend my left so far north as the Vimy ridge, but to have a wider front of attack on the south side of the Scarpe. He stated he did not know exactly why I had not fallen in with his suggestion.

“I had previous to this explained how thoroughly

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friendly the relations between the two armies now were, and that in my opinion the staffs at our General Headquarters were more at home together than at any time in my experience during the past  $2\frac{1}{2}$  years of war.

"I now explained in French why I rejected Nivelle's suggestion not to attack the Vimy ridge. Briefly, I said that for tactical reasons, my left flank must rest either about a mile or so on the south side of Monchy-le-Preux ridge (i.e. south of the river Scarpe) or must be north of and include the Vimy ridge. If our left were placed south of the Scarpe, then, with the number of attacking divisions agreed upon, our right must reach nearly to Gommecourt. The effect of this would be then, if our attack were successful and we broke into the enemy's front, our advance would be held up immediately by the Hindenburg line. In fact, we attacked in a pocket. For these reasons, I had decided to establish the left flank of my attack north of and to include the Vimy ridge in my objectives. Moreover I regarded the Vimy ridge as a very important position for us to hold from a defensive point of view. I was therefore fully decided to attack it, and I was unable now to modify my arrangements on this particular point to please anyone.

"General Lyautey said that my explanations were quite clear, and he regarded my reasons as sound.

"I then explained that I was doing my utmost to comply with the strategical requirements of Nivelle's plan, but in the matter of tactics I alone could decide. That is to say, Nivelle having stated that his plan required the British to break the enemy's front north of the Somme and march on Cambrai, I decided where and how I would dispose my troops for that purpose. Lloyd George at once said, 'he did not understand about strategy and tactics, he would like it clearly stated what the respective responsibilities were'. It was then about 6.45 p.m. He therefore asked the French to

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draw up their proposals for a *system of command* before dinner, so that he, Robertson and I could discuss it after dinner, and a subsequent conference with the French Govt. would then be held to-morrow morning to decide finally. This was agreed to.

“Robertson and I walked about till time to dress for dinner. L.G. said he was ill and did not come to dinner. At table I sat opposite Briand, with Lyautey on my right and Nivelles on my left. We had quite a cheery talk. After dinner I went to Robertson’s room and found him most excited over a typed paper which L.G. had given him containing the French proposals. These were briefly to organise a British Chief of General Staff and Staff at Beauvais (French G.Q.G.) with what they called a ‘Quartermaster General’. This C.G.S. is to report to the War Committee at home. The Commander-in-Chief would apparently only administer the discipline and look after reinforcements.

“Robertson and I then went in to L.G.’s room. The latter now told us that the ‘War Cabinet had decided last week that since this was likely to be the last effort of the French, and they had the larger numbers engaged, in fact it was their battle’, the British Army would be placed under the French Commander-in-Chief’s orders.

“He then asked me my views. I said that in my opinion it would be madness to place the British forces under the French, and that I did not believe our troops would fight under French leadership. At the beginning of the war there was much dissatisfaction in the Army with G.H.Q. because there was an idea that British interests were being sacrificed to those of the French. He agreed that the French demands were excessive, but insisted on Robertson and myself considering ‘a scheme for giving effect to the War Cabinet’s decision’.

“I went with Robertson to his room. He seemed

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thoroughly upset with the attitude of our Prime Minister. Colonel Hankey (Secretary War Committee) further added to our dissatisfaction by saying that 'L.G. had not received full authority from the War Cabinet' for acting as he was doing.

"General Kiggell took part in our discussion and we agreed we would rather be tried by court martial than betray the Army by agreeing to its being placed under the French. Robertson agreed that we must resign rather than be partners in this transaction.

"And so we went to bed, thoroughly disgusted with our Government and the politicians.

"Kiggell, who returned at dinner time from the front, reported that Gough's left had got on well—we were round Puisieux at 4.30 p.m. On the right we had entered La Barque. The advance was on a front of 11 miles and we had advanced two miles in depth in the last 24 hours.<sup>1</sup>

"On going to my room I found a nice cheery letter from Doris which quite brightened things up!"

"*Tuesday, 27 February, 1917.* Glass rose slightly. Fine but dull.

"In the course of the morning of Tuesday, 27 February, 1917, and before the conference assembled, General Lyautey sent his personal staff officer to beg me to go to his room as he had something very important to tell me. On going to his room I found Nivelles with him. They both spoke of the 'insult offered to me and the British Army by the paper which Briand had had produced'. They assured me that they had not seen the document until quite recently. Indeed, as regards Lyautey, he had not seen or heard of it until he entered the train at Paris to come to Calais to—

<sup>1</sup>This advance was the result of a local German withdrawal, preliminary to the main German retirement to the Hindenburg line on March 16th. See page 60 *infra*.



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day. I understand that the paper was drawn up in Paris with Lloyd George's approval, and of course that of Briand.

"Thinking over the proposals of the French, and the decision of our Government, I thought it best to put my conclusions shortly in writing to the C.I.G.S. This I did in A (below) before breakfast (8.15 a.m.) and gave it to Robertson requesting him to put it before L.G. and that I would not go to see him unless sent for.

(A)

*SECRET*

"Calais,

27 February, 1917.

"To The C.I.G.S.

I have in the short time available considered the decision of the War Cabinet (of which Mr. Lloyd George informed us last night) viz., to place the British Army in France under the orders of the French Commander-in-Chief, and the proposals of the French to give effect to that decision.

"In my opinion there are only two alternatives, viz.:

"1. To leave matters as they are now, or

"2. To place the British Army in France entirely under the French Commander-in-Chief.

"The decision to adopt the second of these proposals must involve the disappearance of the British Commander-in-Chief and G.H.Q. What further changes would be necessary must depend on the French Commander-in-Chief and the French Government under whom he acts.

"So drastic a change in our system at a moment when active operations on a large scale have already commenced seems to me to be fraught with the gravest danger.

D. Haig, F.M.

Commanding British Armies in France.

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“About 9.30 Robertson sent to ask me to come to his room. He had a paper ready giving L.G.’s solution.

“This distinguished between the period intervening between the period of signing the document, and the date of commencing the battle. *In the first period*, I should conform to Nivelle’s instructions as regards preparations for the battle, but am free to depart from these ‘if I think the safety of the Army endangered or success prejudiced’. In this case I am to report action taken to War Cabinet. *In the second period* the Army is to act entirely as Nivelle orders. At an interview with Lloyd George I objected to this and insisted on having added that I have ‘a free hand to choose the means and methods of utilising the British troops in that sector of operations allotted by the French Commander-in-Chief in the original plan’. This was concurred in by Nivelle. A document was then drawn up embodying these points. As it stands, the way in which I have worked with the French is not changed. I have always acted on Gen. Joffre’s ‘General Instructions’ as if they had been orders, but retained absolute freedom of action as to how I carried them out. This power must however remain to me. In Nivelle’s present proposals I am relieved of responsibility both for the plan of the battle now being prepared, as well as for the details of execution of the plan.

“To settle the above there was much going to and fro between the parties interested. Robertson did the going to and fro; he seemed to have passed a restless night—indeed, it seems he could not sleep, and at 2 or 3 a.m. knocked up his assistant (Major-Gen. Maurice) to come and discuss the situation with him.

“Finally we all met at 11.30 about, that is, the members of British and French Governments with the four soldiers and one interpreter.

“The document was considered and passed with a small

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addition, that 'the British and French War Cabinets should each judge when the operations shall be deemed to have terminated so far as its own Army is concerned'.

"The battle is expected to last about a fortnight, and after that, the normal state of arrangements will be reverted to.

"In the matter of railway supply the French Govt. have the responsibility for providing the necessary trains. Nivelle was of opinion that the British demands are in excess of what a similar French force would want. I pointed out that our position is different in that we (British) are not allowed to requisition in France; on the other hand, the French requisition in our area. Also, until the figures of the two Armies were drawn up on a similar basis, no conclusions could be drawn.

"The two documents were then signed by all of us, and a copy taken by each Government. I am to receive a copy of the 'procès verbal' of the proceedings.

"I had a few words with Nivelle regarding the standing of the chief liaison officer at Beauvais. He asked me to send him a senior officer who had my confidence. I said I had not yet thought of this, but would Davidson suit him? He suggested that I could not spare him. So I wondered why he had not jumped at getting Tavish,<sup>1</sup> because until now T. has always been a very great favourite at French G.Q.G.

"It was now nearly 12.30, and as the conference then turned to the discussion of Salonika, I came away. Briand asked me to lunch, but I felt I had seen enough of him for the time being, so I left at once with Kiggell and Sassoon."

Thus, in the plain, unvarnished English which readers of this book will have come to recognise as the language of Haig, are set down the remarkable events of the Calais conference. More important than the agreement there concluded, or the events that sprang from it, was the manner in

<sup>1</sup>The nickname of Major-General Sir John Davidson.

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which the whole business had been conducted. The sequel will show that, so far as the actual fighting was concerned, Nivelle's new position produced no consequence of great importance, and that, although relations between him and Haig were never so frank and friendly again, no untoward event occurred which a better understanding between them could have avoided.

But for Haig, at any rate, and for Robertson in perhaps a lesser degree, these events had been a revelation of the kind of methods that were being employed against them. On the Saturday before the conference Robertson had been informed that, contrary to the general usage, his presence at the meeting of the War Cabinet would not be required, the assumption naturally being that military matters were not down for discussion; and yet at this meeting the tremendous military decision was taken to place the whole of the British Army under the command of a French officer who was junior to the British Commander-in-Chief and had not hitherto conducted any operation on the vast scale that was now in contemplation. Having persuaded his colleagues to take such a military decision without consulting one of their military advisers, the Prime Minister deliberately concealed it from his Chief of the Imperial General Staff, whom together with his Commander-in-Chief he lured to an inter-allied conference without any knowledge of the matter they were to discuss or the proposals that were to be made, although, behind their backs, he had previously arrived at a secret agreement with the French authorities. It has been shown how, although Haig's first impressions of Lloyd George had not been favourable, he had nevertheless made every effort to co-operate with him loyally. A fatal blow at such co-operation was struck at Calais. There can be little successful co-operation where there is no confidence.

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When Lyautey apologised to Haig for the insult offered to him and to the British Army he was speaking the language which soldiers all over the world would understand. What were the actual words in which on the same occasion Nivelle disclaimed any but recent knowledge of the document produced by Briand we do not know, but it has now been proved that the document itself had actually been drafted at Nivelle's own headquarters a week before.<sup>1</sup>

It may be argued, not without plausibility, that in time of war the end must often justify the means, and that if a new arrangement, such as was here contemplated, seemed likely to produce decisive results, it was the duty of those who believed in it to secure its adoption at all costs. But to create distrust and despondency in the Higher Command of an army must prove too great a price to pay for any reform, however desirable. Here again the initial weakness of Lloyd George's position betrayed him. He wanted new men and new methods, but he dared not get new men and therefore he was reduced to forcing new methods upon the old men, and in order to secure their acceptance he had to resort to a system of subterfuge which destroyed those men's faith in him for ever.

Unity of command is a phrase that in many people's minds has come to produce the effect of a talisman. Not only do they believe that it was unity of command which was responsible for winning the war in 1918, but also they are convinced that had it been resorted to at any earlier period the result produced would have been the same, and that the lack of it was responsible for all our troubles.

In this connection there are certain facts which should be clearly realised. The first is that from the very beginning of the war, so far as the strategy of the western front was concerned, unity of command virtually existed. Only once,

<sup>1</sup>See *French Official History of the War*, vol. 5, p. 224, footnote.

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when French threatened to withdraw his army south of the Seine, was such unity seriously threatened. That threat was removed by the action of Kitchener. Had French hesitated to respond to Joffre's appeal to turn and fight on the Marne it would have been again imperilled. But he did not hesitate, and on the Marne and on the Aisne, at Loos and before Ypres, and throughout 1916, every action in which the British Army was engaged was fought with the full approval of the French Commander-in-Chief, who even during that period was referred to in common parlance as the Generalissimo.

We have seen how when Haig took over the supreme command one of his first actions was to explain to the head of the French mission exactly what his position was in relation to the French Commander-in-Chief. He had then pointed out to Colonel des Vallières that while he was not under General Joffre's orders it was his firm intention to carry out General Joffre's wishes on strategical matters "as if they were orders".<sup>1</sup>

We have seen that it was the French Commander-in-Chief who decided when and where the Battle of the Somme should be fought, and we have seen how, after its conclusion, Joffre and Haig were in complete agreement with regard to the campaign for the coming year. When Nivelle took the place of Joffre and plans were changed, Haig accepted all the alterations without demur, agreeing to take that part in the coming battle which Nivelle had decided that he should take, and only insisting on the control of tactics in his own zone. It is plain that he was prepared to serve Nivelle as loyally as he had served Joffre; and Nivelle himself, when encouraged to do so by Lloyd George, was unable to find a single cause of complaint against him.

There exists no historical parallel with the military pro-

<sup>1</sup> See vol. i, p. 287.

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blem that had confronted the Allies during these years. Never before have two vast national armies, each embodying the greater part of the nation's manhood, taken the field together, side by side. The small professional armies of the past often acted as allies; Marlborough, Wellington, Napoleon and many another general commanded armies composed of more than one nationality, but the circumstances were utterly dissimilar.

Unfortunately in this world credit is never given for what may be termed negative achievement. Nobody receives praise for the friction that is avoided, for the unpleasant incident that does not take place. Rarely can there have been greater scope for such friction and for such incidents than when two proud and jealous nations fought side by side with varying success and many setbacks during four long years against a common foe. Reference has already been made to the difficulties which the English and the French experience in understanding one another. Of course there was criticism on each side of the other's performances, but such criticism was uttered *sotto voce*, it never reached a pitch where it would have presented a dangerous problem, it never penetrated into the parliament or the press of either country.

It is, however, not difficult to imagine the situation which might easily have arisen, if during any long period the British Army had been under the direct command of a French general. In days of disaster democracies demand a scapegoat. During the retreat from Mons how eagerly would a section of the public and of the press have proclaimed that our brave fellows were longing to fight and that it was only the French generals who insisted on running away. Longing to fight indeed they were, and it was only discipline, based upon confidence in their own officers, that nerved them to support the ordeal of retreat. When French

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assistance at Loos proved disappointing, when on the Somme the British casualties were higher than the French, it would have been claimed that our soldiers were being sacrificed, and not unnaturally sacrificed, by foreign commanders who wished to preserve the lives of their own men.

In fact, unity of command in the early stages of the war would have been a dangerous and might have proved a fatal experiment. So long as the two Commanders-in-Chief worked harmoniously together, and so long as the British Commander-in-Chief remembered his orders, which were to conform to the wishes of his French colleague unless he thought the safety of his own army was endangered, so long unity of command was as undesirable as it was unnecessary. But when the policy of the French Commander-in-Chief seemed to consider the safety of his own army only and to abandon that of his ally to its fate, then the moment came that unity of command was essential, for if one general commanded both armies he could abandon neither. It will be seen how, when that moment came, Haig was the first to appreciate the position, to make the suggestion of unity of command and to secure its adoption.

There was, moreover, an important difference between the arrangement in which Haig cheerfully acquiesced in 1918 and that which was forced upon him in 1917. In 1918 there were two armies, the French and the British. Pétain continued to command the one and Haig the other. Over both of them, as supreme Generalissimo, was Foch. He had no more to do with the French Army than with the British. Pétain's position as Commander-in-Chief of the French Army was no less subordinate than that of Haig. They both continued to function as independent Commanders-in-Chief. But the situation which Nivelle had envisaged was entirely different. He was to remain Commander-in-Chief



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of the French Army and the British Army was to become merely a part of his force, its former Commander-in-Chief being reduced to the position of an army or a corps commander, taking orders from him in the same way as would any other subordinate.

Nivelle lost no time in making plain to Haig the meaning which he attached to the convention of Calais and the spirit in which he intended to interpret it. On the same day that he returned to his headquarters he addressed to the British Commander-in-Chief a letter couched in more peremptory terms than the latter was accustomed to employ when writing to his subordinate army commanders. Nivelle, for instance, ordered Haig to furnish him not only with copies of his instructions to his army commanders, but also to let him know what steps the army commanders had taken to carry out their instructions. Haig, on the other hand, had never been in the habit of asking his army commanders to let him see the instructions which they sent to their subordinates in charge of corps or divisions, let alone the actions which such subordinates had taken to comply with their instructions. He further required Haig to place Henry Wilson at the head of the British mission at French headquarters and gave orders for the redistribution of British troops.

“Briefly,” wrote Haig, “it is a type of letter which no gentleman could have drafted, and it also is one which certainly no Commander-in-Chief of this great British Army should receive without protest.

“By the Calais agreement I only come under his orders after the battle commences and then only for operations in the sector assigned to me already. I intend to send a copy of the letter with my reply to the War Committee with a request to be told whether it is their wishes that the Commander-in-Chief in command of this British Army should

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be subjected to such treatment by a junior *foreign* commander.

“It is too sad at this critical time to have to fight with one’s allies and the Home Government in addition to the enemy in the field.”

The tragic irony of the situation lay in the fact that, whereas it had been Lloyd George’s honest and laudable desire to secure greater unity, the result of his methods had been to destroy such unity as had hitherto existed, and to stir up ill will between the Allies and distrust between the soldiers and the politicians.

Robertson wrote of Lloyd George to Haig on February 28th, “His story at the War Cabinet this morning gave quite a wrong impression. He accused the French of putting forward a monstrous proposal, and yet you and I know that he was at the bottom of it. I believe he equally misled the Cabinet last Saturday. Derby is telling Balfour the whole truth. The former talked of resigning last night. He was furious and *disgusted*. He spoke up like a man for you this morning and insisted on a letter of confidence and explanation being sent to you. This will come in a day or two. Meanwhile I pray you and Nivelle may hit it off. These things always happen in war. But they are worse now than ever. Still I can’t believe that a man such as he can remain for long head of any Government. Surely *some* honesty and truth are required.”

The Cabinet passed a resolution to the effect that the Commander-in-Chief should be informed that the only object of the Calais convention had been to secure “a clearly defined unity of control” and that “it was in no sense an aspersion on the ability and qualifications of Sir Douglas Haig in whom the War Cabinet continue to entertain full confidence”. Lord Derby forwarded the above to Haig with a private covering letter assuring him of

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stronger support and of warmer regard than the somewhat colourless text of the resolution conveyed.

Haig had signed the Calais convention, as he explained, in a private letter at the time, in order to indicate "that I would loyally do my best to carry out its provisions *not* that I thought such a paper to be desirable or necessary. So far this document merely defines in words, what I have, in the spirit of the instructions I received from Lord Kitchener, been trying to do, viz. (in his words) 'to achieve that end (the defeat of the enemy) the closest co-operation of French and British as a united Army must be the governing policy'" —and he therefore hoped that "as the actual document stands, no great difficulty will occur in carrying on just as I have been doing *provided* there is not something behind it."

It appears that the Secretary of State for War was almost as much in the dark as the Chief of the Imperial General Staff with regard to the Prime Minister's intentions at the Calais conference. Lord Derby wrote to Haig on March 3rd, "If I had known there was to be any proposal to put you and our Army under the full control of the French, I should most vigorously have protested.

"It may be as well to let you know exactly what occurred as far as I know it. Mr. Lloyd George told us at the War Cabinet that, although an agreement had been reached at the conference in London, there was nothing to which both our own representatives and those of the French had put their hand in a formal signature, and it was very advisable, in view of possible recriminations afterwards, to get these signatures. I therefore was under the impression that this was the sole object of the conference so far as the fresh offensive was concerned, but that the matter of transportation was also going to be discussed. You can therefore judge of my surprise when I heard of what took place at Calais.

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“The proposal of the French was a preposterous one. As to who was the real originator I should not like to say. I know that both Robertson and you think that its source was England, but, from what I have heard, I am not quite certain that it was not the politicians (*not* the soldiers) of France who were the primary instigators. I quite believe that neither Lyautey nor Nivelle knew of it until just before the meeting, and I also believe their assurances given, I think, to Robertson and you that they neither originated it nor desired it.

“Of course the proposal was an impossible one, and could not have been accepted by anybody. I am not sure, however, that I like the new proposal much better. It all turns on the interpretation given to the word ‘conform’. If that word means the carrying out ‘by agreement’ the general plans agreed upon, altering them as circumstances may require, well and good, because I am certain that your one wish has been loyally to carry out the wishes of the Cabinet in this matter, and that, even if not in complete agreement, you would subordinate your views to Nivelle’s, so long as they did not jeopardise your force, or any part of it.

“But if ‘conform’ to orders means to obey orders given, then it seems to me that the necessity for agreement goes by the board, and that you and the British Army come directly under French control, with the power to move our troops how and where they like.”

Nivelle’s letter of February 27th proved that Derby’s fears with regard to the working of the convention were justified, and that Haig’s hopes of a satisfactory understanding were vain. Nivelle’s case has never been stated. His apologist has not yet appeared. To the student of Haig’s career Nivelle presents a problem. Until the date of the Calais conference he appears to have been a loyal, reliable

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and accommodating colleague; but from that date onwards he became vain, peevish, intractable and dictatorial. It may be that Colonel d'Alençon exercised a sinister influence, or it may be that he realised too late that he had undertaken a task he could not perform, made promises that he could not fulfil, and that this fearful knowledge preyed upon his mind. Whichever be the true explanation, there might be written upon his sad grave the epitaph that Tacitus coined for Galba—*omnium consensu capax imperii nisi imperasset.*

Derby now found himself in a position not dissimilar from that of Haig. For either of them resignation would have been easy, but both believed it to be their duty to remain.

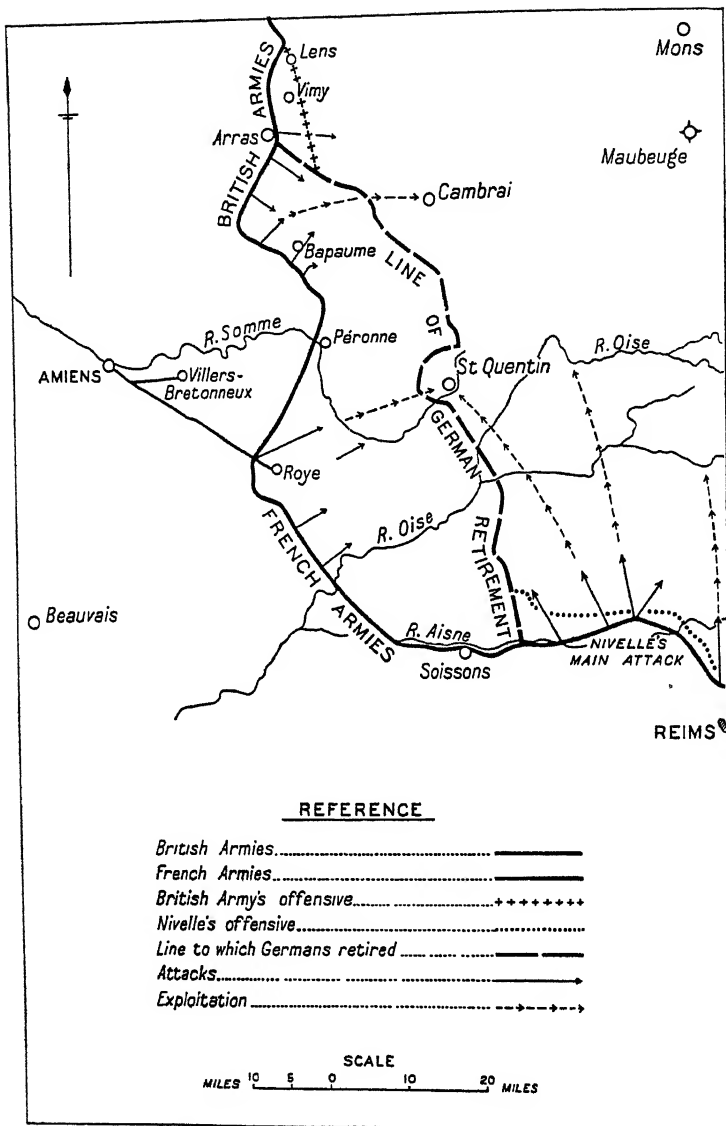
“How I hate all this intrigue,” wrote Derby. “I wish I could stop it, and I could—but only by pulling the house down about our ears. I don't see how we can go back on the agreement for the present offensive, without infuriating the French and risking the alliance.”

And Haig wrote, “I feel it a cowardly thing to shirk going through with a difficult situation by sending in one's resignation.” It was that feeling which held him to his post until the end, but from now onwards there was a strain of bitterness in his mind, faint but definite, and summed up in the concluding sentence of a long day's diary, “All would be so easy if I only had to deal with Germans.”

While counsel was thus being darkened and action delayed the enemy had not been idle. During these days the German Army was successfully accomplishing that strategic retreat to previously prepared positions which shortened their lines, and enormously strengthened their defence. This series of withdrawals began with the evacuation of the Bapaume salient on February 23rd, and concluded with the main retirement to the so-called Hindenburg line on March 16th. The actual front upon which Nivelle designed to



# THE NIVELLE OFFENSIVE



MAP 2.

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deliver his main attack was not affected, save in so far as the strengthening and shortening of the line naturally rendered it easier for the enemy to transfer reinforcements to a threatened sector. The retirement did not, as will be seen from Map No. 2, extend north of Arras, and therefore the Vimy ridge still remained as an objective; but the whole of the remaining portion of the front which the British and northern group of French armies were to attack had been withdrawn, and it is therefore hardly too much to say that the situation presented a fresh military problem. Nivelle, however, determined to apply to it the same solution, upon which his heart was now so firmly fixed.

One of the lessons of Calais was that the signature of a convention does not always clarify a situation and that a conference is apt to breed conferences. In view of the uncertainty that now prevailed and of the different interpretations put upon the convention by Haig and Nivelle, it was determined to hold a further conference which met in London on March 12th.

Haig arrived the evening before and immediately visited Robertson, who "had been so upset about the Calais conference and its results" that he had taken to his bed. While they were discussing the situation a message came summoning Haig to Buckingham Palace, where he received the comforting assurance that he still retained the absolute confidence of his King.

That evening he completed a memorandum which was submitted to the War Cabinet the following morning. It sets out the situation as he then saw it with transparent lucidity. "As the Cabinet are aware I am of opinion that, from a purely military point of view, the recent Cabinet decision as recorded in the agreement made at Calais on 27th February last is open to grave objections; and I fear that it will tend to impair rather than to promote unity of effort.



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"I pointed out, in my official memorandum handed to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff at Calais on the morning of 27th February, that I could see no satisfactory alternative between the system which obtained previous to the Calais conference and the placing of our armies in France entirely under the French Commander-in-Chief, the latter being a course which I did not recommend.

"The proposals put forward by the French authorities at the conference would practically have given them complete control of our armies, but these proposals were not accepted and eventually a compromise was decided on.

"While realising the difficulties of working this compromise successfully I felt it my duty to say that I would do my best to give effect to the Cabinet's decision. I have done so and will continue to do so, but the situation which has arisen since the conference, in regard to the relations between the French and British Commands, appears to me to be so unsatisfactory and even dangerous that I think it necessary to make a full and frank statement of my views on it. I do so after careful reflection and with a full sense of the seriousness of what I have to say.

"At Calais General Nivelle assured me that the proposed alteration of our existing relations had not been brought about by any action or wish of his, or even with his knowledge. I believed that he would help me to make the best of a difficult situation, but that hope has not been realised.

"Immediately after the conference I received from him instructions, couched in somewhat dictatorial language, and this communication was followed a few days later by another in a still stronger tone. Apart from any question of personal dignity, which I am anxious to sink as far as I can, I submit that the tone of these letters, addressed to a British Field Marshal, commanding the largest armies the Empire

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has ever placed in the field and drawn from all parts of it, is open to objection.

“A still more serious objection is that in these letters an effort is made to grasp more power over our armies than was conferred by the Calais agreement.

“This tendency was shown in the original proposals made by the French authorities at the Calais conference, and it appears again in the entire change proposed in the duties of the British mission at French General Headquarters.

“Hitherto the head of this mission has been my representative with the French Commander-in-Chief, and I understood that this system was to continue and that all that was asked for was more senior officers and a larger number of them. This, if considered advantageous, I am quite ready to accede to, but what is now asked for amounts to a British General Staff through which I am to receive General Nivelle’s orders and which is to report direct, over my head, to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

“I had heard rumours before the Calais conference of a desire in some quarters in France to gain practically complete control over the British armies and even to break up their unity and ‘sandwich’ British units and formations between French troops under French control.

“I do not presume to say that responsible French authorities would countenance any such scheme, but I cannot overlook the tendency shown to seize more power as witnessed by the facts I have quoted.

“It is natural that France should hope to emerge from the war with national triumph and as great a position as possible in the eyes of the world; but in my opinion it would be very dangerous to fail to make full allowance for national feeling on our side also and especially in our armies. If those armies were placed under French control I

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venture to say that, apart from feelings of wounded dignity, a belief might very easily arise that British interests and British casualties were being treated as—at most—secondary considerations, and very serious friction would result.

“Whatever may be the views of the War Cabinet on these questions I must point out to them that at a moment when all my energies and thoughts should be devoted to dealing with a very complicated military situation, which is likely to develop into the decisive crisis of the war, I find myself involved in what almost amounts to a controversy with our Allies, of such importance that much of my time is taken up by it.

“In my view there is too much at stake for me to avoid this controversy. As I conceive my duties and responsibilities I cannot consent to order operations or to make dispositions which I believe to be dangerous or unsound and likely to prejudice the safety, welfare and success of the British armies under my command. My position and that of my General Headquarters would become impossible if the Calais agreement were strained by the French command beyond what I conceive to have been intended by the War Cabinet.

“A remedy for the existing state of affairs is very urgently required. I recognise that the Calais agreement must hold good until the situation on which it was based is judged by the War Cabinet to have changed; but I submit that the intention and terms of the agreement, which appear to me to have been misunderstood by the French authorities, should now be so clearly defined as to prevent any future misunderstanding. With that object in view I venture to suggest that it should be made clear to the French authorities:

“That except with the British Commander-in-Chief’s consent the French command is not authorised to issue in-

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structions to, or have any direct official communication with any commander, body of troops, or individual in the British armies, other than the British Commander-in-Chief, with whom alone the execution of such instructions will rest.

“That the French Commander-in-Chief is not to inspect British troops or visit them officially without the British Commander-in-Chief’s consent.

“That while it will be the duty of the British Commander-in-Chief to furnish general information as to his plans to give effect to operations arranged for, it is not within the right of the French Commander-in-Chief to demand copies of his orders or of the plans made within the British armies to carry out such orders.

“That the French Commander-in-Chief is not permitted to remove any British troops or individuals from the command of their Commander-in-Chief or call on the latter to detach any of his troops from his own direct command except with his consent. In case of such a detachment being made it will remain under the orders of the British Commander-in-Chief.

“That while the British Commander-in-Chief has been directed to conform to General Nivelle’s instructions under certain defined conditions, it is desirable that General Nivelle should address his instructions in the form of requests to an equal and not as orders to a subordinate.

“That the conditions laid down in the Calais agreement referred specifically to certain defined offensive operations and do not give the French Commander-in-Chief any right to dictate to the British Commander-in-Chief on other offensive operations or on such questions as the defence of the remainder of his front, or the measures taken and dispositions made therefor.

“That in case of difference of opinion the British War

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Cabinet reserves to itself the right to decide as to whether any given conditions fall under the terms of the Calais conference or not.

“As regards the new mission it is essential that the duties and responsibilities to be entrusted to it be clearly defined before it is appointed and that it be definitely laid down in writing, and agreed to, that the members of the mission are the representatives of the British Commander-in-Chief and are under his orders. They are not to be regarded as staff officers of the French Commander-in-Chief, authorised to convey his instructions to the British Commander-in-Chief, though they may be employed if so desired to draft such instructions for General Nivelle’s signature.

“All instructions and communications should be signed by General Nivelle and not by a staff officer.

“Finally I suggest that it would help me in a difficult task if the War Cabinet saw fit to communicate to the French Government the expression of confidence in myself which was conveyed to me in War Office letter No. O.1/86/253 dated 2nd March, 1917, and their belief in my will and intention to carry out loyally the terms of the Calais agreement.

“I trust that in due course the relations existing before the Calais conference will be restored, as I am convinced that more satisfactory results can be obtained on those lines.

“In the meantime if the above recommendations are accepted I consider that it should prove easier than it is now to carry out the terms and to attain the objects of the Calais agreement, and I desire to state my emphatic opinion that otherwise the present difficulties are likely to increase, and an impasse may be reached, despite my earnest desire to sink all personal considerations and to do my utmost to ensure the success of the allied cause.”

On the morning of March 12th Haig paid an early call

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at Derby House in order to visit the Secretary of State. He thought Lord Derby looked "more pulled down with worry over the Calais conference than even Robertson did last night. He condoled with me, said Government had treated me disgracefully. I assured him that although I realised that fact, I felt no ill will against any of them. That I wanted nothing more in the way of reward, and that if the Government had anyone else whom they wished to put in my place, let them do so at once—and I would try and retire gracefully without causing the Government of the country any trouble or loss of prestige. He (like the King) assured me that the last thing they wanted was that I should retire. I told him that I had no objection to appointing Sir H. Wilson to be head of our British mission to French G.Q.G. provided the duties of the appointments were first clearly settled and in accordance with the needs of G.H.Q.

"... The morning passed in messages going to and from me at the flat to Robertson at War Office.

"Between 12 and 1 I saw Sir H. Wilson who came to the flat at my request. I showed him all the papers connected with the Calais conference. He agreed that the difficulty arose from the French trying to work on the 'projet d'organisation etc.' (which had been rejected) while I worked loyally on the Calais agreement. We had a long talk and I came to the conclusion that it would be best for me to trust him and appoint him as head of the reorganised mission at French G.Q.G. In the meantime I asked him to go at once to Downing Street and see Lord Milner and impress on him what the French real intentions were and the necessity for him to oppose them.

"I lunched with Doris at the flat and soon after Wilson arrived to tell me that he had seen Milner, that the War Cabinet was entirely in my favour, and that I could there-

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fore appear before them confident that the Prime Minister would support me.

“The French representatives arrived at 3 p.m. Between 3.30 and 4 p.m. Robertson and I saw the Prime Minister at 10 Downing Street. The War Cabinet had accepted the conclusions at which I had arrived in my letter of this morning, and Lloyd George had had a copy of them extracted which he proposed to put to General Nivelle on his arrival.

“Shortly after this Nivelle arrived and L.G. saw him and settled the points of divergence, and then asked Robertson and myself to join them. This we did and after a short talk we soldiers adjourned to the War Office and discussed the details of the ‘conclusions’ for submission to the conference to-morrow. We also considered the general situation and the effect on Nivelle’s plans of the enemy’s withdrawal from the front of our Fifth Army.

“With slight modifications Nivelle accepted the English document put before him by Robertson. As to plans, we agreed that it was most important to go forward with the plans of attack as soon as possible without change, i.e. attacks near Arras, and that toward Laon by the French Reserve Group of Armies. At the same time, he must be prepared to remove divisions from Franchet d’Esperey’s command to Champagne, if the enemy were found to be retiring on his present front. As to our Fifth Army (Gough) I had already moved his reserves behind my First and Third Armies, while the heavy guns are to reinforce my Third Army, instead of bringing other guns from our Second Army front as was arranged in our original programme.

“When Nivelle, Robertson and I left the Prime Minister’s room the rest of the French mission arrived—M. Cambon (Ambassador in London) begged me to dine at his Embassy to-night. I regretted that I was engaged. Then

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General Lyautey asked me to dine and, if I could not, at any rate, to come to the French Embassy after dinner. I said I would be there at 9.30 p.m., but it was impossible to dine.

"Before I left the War Office Lyautey called. Robertson then went to see the King, so that I had 15 minutes quiet talk with Lyautey alone. He is a thorough gentleman whom I can trust.

"I dined with Doris at the flat, and at 9.30 p.m. I went as promised to the French Embassy. The party there had finished dinner and were in the drawing room upstairs. I found myself to be the only Englishman present, and was most warmly welcomed. Lloyd George had declined the French Ambassador's invitation, and I expect that our other ministers felt that the situation was strained.

"I talked to Lyautey and A. Thomas. I told them exactly the facts how after the Calais conference many young French officers had behaved as if the British Army was a subordinate force; how in aiming at 'unity of command' they had mistaken the means for the end, which was 'unity of effort'. The friction which had thus begun might have far-reaching evil consequences unless the French War Office and G.Q.G. took proper steps to stop it at once.

"I then went into a private room with Lyautey, who asked me very privately whether I was satisfied with the French officers at G.Q.G. I said I was quite satisfied, but I felt that Col. d'Alençon, Nivelles's confidential staff officer, was a cause of trouble; he disliked every Englishman. He quite agreed and said he was most disagreeable even to himself. We parted the best of friends. The Ambassador came downstairs to the door to see me off and bid me good night. It was 11.15 p.m. when I left the French Embassy. I felt that I had been very forgiving and only the need of working with the French Army in order to win had dragged me there."



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The next day, March 13th, "I walked with Doris and Philip Sassoon to Downing Street for conference at 10.30 a.m. Mr. Lloyd George had had the French delegates to breakfast, and said that they were all delighted at my visit to the Embassy last night and that, if anything happened to Nivelle, they would wish me to command, etc. All this in chaff, but it showed how a little civility is appreciated by the French. Then Robertson arrived, and asked me to go into the adjoining room and look over some alternative proposals which Nivelle had put to him at 10 a.m. to-day. These were to replace the paragraphs agreed upon last night. I was surprised at Nivelle's change of mind. But Robertson said that the new paragraphs in French embodied all that was in our papers but in a less objectionable form for the French. However, I entirely objected to the first paragraph which dealt with the 'preparatory stage' (para. 3 of the Calais agreement). It now directed that I was to carry out Nivelle's instructions whether I approved or not and then complain afterwards. I could not accept this, and Nivelle said he did not think it necessary but his Government did.

"We then went into the conference room. All seemed most friendly at first, but eventually the French wanted to get the paragraph referred to above accepted. It was unseemly the way in which they argued, and Lyautey seemed to me to be ashamed of his countrymen. Lloyd George was firm and the clause was rejected.

"We lunched at Buckingham Palace at 1.30. I sat next to Lord Farquhar and Lord Kenyon. After lunch we all talked to the King and Queen in turn, and when the company had taken leave of Their Majesties, the King asked me to accompany him and the Queen to their private rooms. We then had half an hour's talk. The King was pleased at the result of the conference, and was again very outspoken in

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his determination to 'support me through thick and thin'.

"On leaving Buckingham Palace soon after 3 p.m. I went to 21 Princes Gate and joined Doris who had lunched there.

"In the afternoon we called on Mr. Leopold de Rothschild. The old man was ill in bed, but was delighted to see me.

"At 6 p.m. I received Sir Henry Wilson and General Kiggell at the flat. The former put forward very straightforwardly his reasons against going to French G.Q.G. as the head of the British mission. Briefly he felt sure that whatever he did he would be credited with intriguing against the Commander-in-Chief. I told him that he would have my complete confidence in military matters, and that, looking to the future and the possibility that Nivelle's plans might not meet with a full measure of success, it seemed most desirable to have a senior British officer and one who is trusted by the French at Nivelle's headquarters. So we decided that he should go to Beauvais."

The agreement that was eventually arrived at between the two Governments, and was signed by the two Commanders-in-Chief, was far from being entirely satisfactory to Haig, but he was prepared to make almost any concession in order to secure an amicable settlement. Before signing the document, however, he wrote above his signature, "I agree with the above on the understanding that, while I am fully determined to carry out the Calais agreement in spirit and letter, the British Army and its Commander-in-Chief will be regarded by General Nivelle as allies and not as subordinates, except during the particular operations which he explained at the Calais conference. Further, while I also accept the agreement respecting the functions of the British mission at French headquarters it should be understood that these functions may be subject to modifications as experience shows to be necessary."

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The agreement was approved by the War Cabinet on the morning of March 14th, Haig being present. He explained to them the general plan upon which he and Nivelle had determined, namely:

(1) To continue pressing enemy back with advanced guards wherever he is giving way.

(2) To launch the main attack as soon as possible.

"As to the Army," he went on, "my plan based on the foregoing is:

"(1) To continue to make all preparations (as arranged) for attacks by First and Third Armies, keeping adequate reserves available either to support my Second Army (Ypres) or to exploit the success of our attacks near Arras. These reserves are obtained from the Fifth Army.

"(2) *If successful* at Arras, exploit with all reserves and the cavalry.

"(3) *If not successful*, prepare to launch attacks near Ypres to clear the Belgian coast. All cavalry will be required probably if this attack is successful.

"The attack on Messines ridge might be made in May if desirable."

This then was the end of the London conference, which had done something to retrieve the errors of the Calais conference, but which had done nothing more. Haig was slow to take offence and quick to forgive. So far as Nivelle was concerned he was unwilling to believe that a fellow soldier could have been guilty of double dealing. That he should have presumed too much upon the authority that he believed the Calais convention had given him was regrettable but not unpardonable; that he had had nothing to do with the ambush into which Haig and Robertson had been led at Calais Haig continued and preferred to believe.

On March 15th Nivelle wrote to Haig:

"I have read the postscript that you thought you ought

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to add to the agreement of the 13th March, 1917. I have no observation to make on it since it only registers a state of affairs which already existed. I don't think, as a matter of fact, that I have adopted an attitude towards the British Army or their Commander-in-Chief which could give ground for fear that I considered them as subordinates and not as allies. It would have proved a narrow conception of our loyal collaboration and would have been a sign of ill breeding.

"And it will be the same, do believe me, at all times and even during the particular operations to which you refer.

"May I add that I sincerely hope that I shall not have to be present at similar meetings, and that it is a genuine satisfaction to my conscience to assert that neither the French Government nor I myself was in any way responsible for the last two meetings. The first was in fact summoned by the English Government and three telegrams and a very pressing letter were required to persuade us to attend the conference in London, which was caused by the memorandum which you sent home.

"I shall be very happy to meet you as soon as possible whether you will do me the pleasure of coming here or whether you will suggest a meeting anywhere else."

How far Nivelle was sincere in his protestations is extremely questionable, but sincerity was so much a part of Haig's nature that he was slow to suspect a lack of it in others and he did not hesitate to reply in the frankest and most cordial terms:

"Your kind letter of 15th inst. reached me last night. Many thanks for writing. I heartily reciprocate your wish that there should be no more conferences of the Calais type, and I feel confident that 'unity of *effort*' will be assured with absolute certainty if you and I are allowed to settle our own affairs together without interference from London or Paris.

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In any case I can honestly say that I have only one objective in view and that is to 'beat the German armies'. To attain that end it is of vital importance that the relations existing, not only between you and me, but between every fraction of our forces, should be of the most friendly character. I have always striven to ensure this, and, as I stated at Calais, the relations between all ranks of our armies seem *now* to be more genuinely united than at any previous time in the war. Hence my fervent desire that nothing should be done which might in any way tend to change these mutual good feelings.

"I do hope and believe that the shadow which the Calais conference seemed at one time to have cast across our path has disappeared, and, as far as I personally am concerned, you can rely on my wholehearted support, and my earnest desire to fall in with your plans to the utmost of my power. I feel sure too that Sir Henry Wilson (who will take this letter to you) is imbued with the same feelings as I hold for the great French Army and its officers, and will serve as a bond of union between you and me in the coming operations. He has my full confidence in military matters, and I am anxious to give him all the means required to enable him to discharge his responsible duties efficiently, and to your satisfaction. So pray inform him fully of your wishes in the matter of the reorganisation of the British mission at your headquarters.

"I propose coming to see you at Beauvais to-morrow if convenient to you, and with all good wishes. . . ."

That this letter expressed Haig's real intentions, and that he was genuinely prepared to forgive and to forget the whole incident, is proved by the entry in his diary five days later when he records what passed at their next interview and the impression which Nivelle made upon him.

"General Nivelle arrived at 8.40 a.m. and stayed till

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nearly 10 o'clock. General Wilson and des Vallières were present during our talk. Nivelles was most pleasant, and I think is a straightforward man. He is in complete agreement with me regarding the general plan, namely to launch our attacks as arranged and, if enemy does not await our attack, to follow him up, and at the same time to organise attacks as soon as possible elsewhere.

"As regards the defence of the coast, he is to see the King of the Belgians to-day and the French general commanding the division at Nieupoort and arrange for necessary reserves being available.

"Des Vallières was then asked to withdraw and Nivelles then explained that he wished to appoint him to an active command, that of a division. I said I would be very sorry indeed to lose him, but I would of course not stand in his way. He asked me whom I would like to succeed him. He suggested de Ballaigue de Bougas. I said certainly, and added that I found all the French officers now at the French mission here most agreeable.

"We then spoke about General Lyautey. Nivelles stated that he is now in Paris, very much upset at his failure as War Minister.<sup>1</sup> He had seen him yesterday and received a copy of his speech from him. This he left with me to read. It seemed that Lyautey never got beyond the first paragraph, which stated that on public grounds he was unable to give the information asked for. The rest of his speech was most conciliatory. Poor Lyautey was too much of a gentleman to get on with the present French deputies, and politicians generally. He is also a very sensitive man, and at the same time liked being appreciated.

"Wilson then withdrew and Nivelles and I spoke about the Belgian ports. He is to see de Brocqueville to-day.

<sup>1</sup>Lyautey had been howled down in the Chamber of Deputies, and had thereupon resigned his office.

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Nivelle mentioned that the Belgians seem afraid that the British will keep a hold over their country. I pointed out the importance of repairing the ports as soon as possible for the purpose of supplying the allied army when we entered Belgium. He quite agreed. On the whole, I like Nivelle; but he seems rather under the influence of Colonel d'Alençon, who dislikes the British."

It is not impossible that Nivelle's increase of civility was due to the fact that he no longer felt his own position was secure. Briand had been from the first his main supporter, but on March 17th Briand's Government fell. Ribot became Prime Minister, with Painlevé as Minister of War. Painlevé was determined to waste no time in acquainting himself with the situation at the front and on March 24th he arrived at Haig's headquarters.

"After dinner I had a long talk with Painlevé. He is a pleasant bright little man. Said to be a great mathematician and an extreme socialist. He is most anxious, he says, to keep on the most friendly terms with the British. Hence his visit to me the day after he took over his office. I thought it was nice of him coming to see me so soon and I was most friendly. I gather that General Pétain is a favourite of his. He questioned me closely about Nivelle. I was careful to say that he struck me as a capable general, and that I was, of course, ready to co-operate with whoever was chosen by the French Government to be their Commander-in-Chief. I said my relations with Nivelle are and have always been excellent.

"The Calais conference was a mistake, but it was not Nivelle's fault.

"We talked on pleasantly till a very late hour. A bad evening for a late talk as the clocks were advanced an hour at 11 p.m. for summer time, and I was done out of an hour's sleep."

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On the last day of the month Haig paid a visit to the battlefield of the Somme and, accompanied by Rawlinson, Kiggell and Montgomery, surveyed those devastated acres which had been the scene of such great glory. That night he wrote in his diary—"No one can visit the Somme battlefields without being impressed with the magnitude of the effort made by the British Army. For five long months this battle continued. Not one battle but a series of great battles were methodically waged by numerous divisions in succession, so that credit for pluck and resolution has been earned by men from every part of the Empire. And credit must be paid not only to the private soldier in the ranks, but also to those splendid young officers who commanded platoons, companies and battalions. Although new to this terrible game of war, they were able, time and again, to form up their commands in the darkness of night, and, in spite of shell holes, wire and other obstacles, lead them forward in the grey of the morning to the attack of those tremendous positions. To many it meant certain death, and all must have known that before they started. Surely it was the knowledge of the great stake at issue, the existence of England as a free nation, that nerved them for such heroic deeds. I have not the time to put down all the thoughts which rush into my mind when I think of all those fine fellows, who either have given their lives for their country, or have been maimed in its service."



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## Chapter XVIII

### NIVELLE'S FAILURE

**T**he spring of 1917 saw great events in the history of the world. Almost simultaneously the Russian Empire crumbled into revolution and the peace loving republic of the United States under a pacifist President decided to take part for the first time in a European War. Both these facts profoundly affected the strategic situation in the west. Once more, however, two divergent schools of thought sprang into being. There were those who argued that, having now the vast wealth and man power of the United States behind them, the Allies would be wise to rest upon the defensive until the weight of all that wealth could make itself felt and until that man power could be transferred to the scene of battle. Others, who believed—as it turned out, rightly—that Russia could not carry on a revolution and a war at the same time, realised that the armies of Germany defending the broad spaces of her eastern frontier might soon be free to reinforce the west, and that it was therefore more than ever incumbent upon the Allies to strike soon and to strike hard.

It should be remembered that at this juncture the French casualties surpassed the English by many hundreds of thousands. Until the Battle of the Somme they had borne the main brunt of the war, and the victory of Verdun had well-nigh cost the nation her life-blood. The new Minister for War was a mathematician whom the superb self-confi-

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dence of General Nivelle failed to convince. Nivelle had boasted too long and too loudly of how he would destroy the German Army in forty-eight hours. He had deliberately scorned secretive methods and courted publicity. He knew, as well as another, how nearly the French Army had approached the limits of endurance and he believed that it was wise for the men themselves to be made aware that only one more great battle divided them from victory and peace. The coming offensive was therefore proclaimed from the housetops and it became common knowledge in the trenches on both sides of the front. So well were the Germans informed of the attack that was coming and so many were the delays before it came that they had ample time to make their preparations in order to ensure that it should fail. They transferred to that section of the front which Nivelle intended to attack, the whole of their First Army from the area of the Somme. It thus happened that when the attack was delivered in April, instead of in February as Joffre had planned, there were sixty-six German divisions where there had been twenty-one two months before, and on the exact front of the attack there were forty-three divisions where there had previously been ten.

This knowledge was not in the possession of the French Commander-in-Chief, but he must have realised that the methods of publicity he had pursued, and the delays he had permitted, made it probable that the enemy should have got wind of his plans, in which case they would certainly have taken steps to defeat them. If such considerations did not give him pause, the fact that he had lost the confidence not only of the Government in Paris but also of his own generals in the field might have deterred the most obstinate of men; but it had no effect upon Nivelle. Of the commanders of the three great groups of armies, Pétain, Micheler, Franchet d'Esperey, there was not one who believed that

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the Generalissimo could accomplish what he had undertaken. Messimy, a deputy and a former Minister for War, but also a professional soldier and recently in command of a brigade, drew up a solemn indictment of the High Command and submitted it to ministers. The result was the calling of a special conference at Compiègne which was attended by ministers, generals and the President of the Republic. There, having heard the gravest doubts expressed by every general present, except the Commander-in-Chief, the Government decided, largely under the influence of the President, to proceed with the original plan.

Meanwhile the British Army, whose fate now depended upon the decisions of French politicians, was loyally preparing to carry out the instructions received. Bitterly did Nivelle exclaim during these anxious days that he wished his own French subordinates would give him as loyal support as that which he received from Haig.<sup>1</sup> Already, while the discussions at Compiègne were proceeding, the bombardment which was to herald the British advance had begun. During the preceding weeks Haig had been true to his policy of giving the enemy no peace. Throughout the last days of March the retiring Germans were pursued and harried by our troops. On the 1st April the village of Savy, four miles from St. Quentin, was captured and a further advance was made on the following day. Haig moved his headquarters to Caix in order to be nearer the battle and successful attacks were carried out by the Third and Fourth Armies on April 4th.

On April 5th Haig and Nivelle met. "I left Caix at 9.30 a.m. by motor for Montdidier, where I met General Nivelle by appointment about 11 a.m.

"A room was provided for us in the sous-préfecture,

<sup>1</sup>See *Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson*, by Major-General C. E. Callwell, vol. i, p. 336.

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which is in a quiet side street, and so public attention was avoided.

"Besides Nivelle and myself, there were present in the room Generals Wilson and Davidson and Colonel Renouard. The latter has not been in favour at French G.H.Q. since Joffre left. I was glad to see him, as he is a good, straight little man and capable. He is in the Third Bureau, which deals with operations.

"Nivelle explained that the recent bad weather had obliged Micheler to ask for a postponement of 48 hours. I said I thought that we had every reason for attacking as soon as possible, lest the enemy should retire before our blow falls. But 24 hours' delay would have this advantage. Owing to bad weather yesterday, Allenby has not been able to photograph the results of his wire cutting. To-day being fine, an extra 24 hours should be sufficient. Gough also wanted another 24 hours to complete his preparations.

"So we agreed to this and Micheler is to postpone for 48 hours.

"I also explained, that as soon as the Vimy ridge was taken, heavy guns will be pushed on to it, and advanced guards move out towards Douai and vicinity. The plan, as already indicated, holds good so far as my command is concerned. As regards the Fifth and Fourth Armies, Gough will attack on the morning following Allenby's attack and Rawlinson is to connect with Franchet d'Esperey's attack. He will bombard and cut wire in front of each of his corps, but will not attack with infantry.

"Nivelle said that he is very pleased with the way in which the situation is developing, and is full of confidence. We agreed to meet at Amiens if anything occurred during the battle which required discussion."

On the morning of April 9th, the postponed attack was finally launched. It was Easter Monday and bitterly cold.

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Drizzling rain mixed with thin snow was falling when at 5.30 a.m. the British soldiers scrambled from their trenches. Later the weather improved. The rain passed over but the intense cold remained. It was not until 8 a.m. that Haig received a report to the effect that the four divisions of Canadians and the VI Corps were doing well and that all first objectives had been gained. All through the morning news kept arriving and it was all good.

In the afternoon Haig drove to the headquarters of the Third Army at St. Pol to visit General Allenby, where there was further information of a satisfactory nature. During this day and the following one the strongly defended Vimy ridge was captured by the Canadians and Haig's wisdom in attacking it was fully demonstrated. This was one of the matters in which his judgment had differed from that of Nivelle, who had believed either that the Germans would evacuate the Vimy ridge of their own accord or, if they failed to do so, that it would prove impregnable. Haig had been convinced it would be strongly held but had not doubted his ability to capture it after proper preparations and with determined troops. The Germans proved his first supposition to be correct and the Canadians justified his second.

Fierce fighting continued during April 10th and 11th and considerable success was achieved, but that worst enemy, the weather, prevented its proper exploitation. Snow fell continually, the ground was sodden and the movement of heavy guns became a long and laborious process.

On the 13th Haig received a message from Nivelle to the effect that the French army group commanders were anxious to postpone operations for another day, a proposition to which he would not consent unless Haig concurred in it. Nivelle's action on this occasion was possibly well

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meant but certainly unusual. By his own desire he had had the British Commander-in-Chief placed under his orders for the period of this battle and now he was asking for the consent of his subordinate before taking an important military decision. We cannot wonder that Haig "felt that it was very mean of Nivelle to place the onus of this decision on me. . . . Since the French have been given the main decisive attack to carry out, we must do all in our power to help them to make their operations a success. If the French attacked at my request and failed the French would blame me. I therefore concurred in whatever postponement Nivelle found necessary to attain the object in view."

It is curious to note how when plans were being made two or three months in advance it was usually the French who demanded an earlier date and usually Haig who, taking into account all the preparations that would be required, found it necessary to insist upon a longer delay; but when it actually came to delivering the blow Haig was always punctual to the day and the hour, whereas the French almost invariably insisted on a postponement.

It is interesting also to remark from what different points of view Haig and Henry Wilson received Nivelle's proposal. Henry Wilson, now the head of the British military mission at Nivelle's headquarters, was serving both Nivelle and Haig with perfect loyalty. He thought, however, that it was "nice" of Nivelle to make Haig's concurrence a condition of agreeing to the postponement, and added in a letter to Haig, "These delays are the mischief but I really believe them to be unavoidable. . . . In a certain sense they are not all to the bad because they put Nivelle into a position—not quite of inferiority but—of apology to you which will be useful later on."

It was Henry Wilson's weakness to think too much of the personal factor and, when faced with an important de-

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cision, to consider how it would affect the prestige of certain individuals. Haig, on the other hand, judged every issue by one standard only—the effect that it would have upon the conduct of the war. This is borne out by a letter which he wrote to Robertson while the battle was still in progress. Robertson on April 14th had written, “As regards regaining proper control over our own armies, I am preparing my arguments. . . . One strong point will be the recent disinclination of the French Government to proceed with the offensive about which they have been pestering us for months past. Smuts has come back from you full of good ideas and he is horrified to find how we are dancing attendance upon the French. He is a great asset, and I only hope we may get things more to our liking before he has to leave.”

Haig replied on the 15th, “I agree that the British Government should reassume full control over the British Expeditionary Force in France at the first favourable opportunity. But the question to settle is when the moment is favourable. I think it would create unnecessary friction and would therefore do more harm than good to the allied cause to raise the question at the present time. All goes smoothly now.

“While touching on the error of the Calais conference, it is well that you should indicate the serious results which have accrued to our cause through the War Cabinet’s decision at the London conference of January by which I was ordered (against my better judgment and protest) to extend my right to the Roye road. But for that ill-timed decision I should now have at my disposal a large reserve of well trained divisions with which to exploit our recent successes.

“Will history ever forgive the members of the War Cabinet for declining in January 1917 to have any confidence in the power of the British Army to play its part with

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credit on the western front? Almost every week gives us fresh indications of the decisive effect of the Somme Battle on the German Army and the German plans."

At last, on April 16th, the long proclaimed and oft postponed attack of the French Army was delivered. While in many places considerable success attended the operations of this first day, it was already by the evening made plain that the high hopes entertained by Nivelle had been illusory and that his proud boasts would never be fulfilled. Haig wrote in his diary that evening, "The French launched their long delayed attack this morning on a front of 25 miles on the river Aisne. Three armies took part. The Fifth Army on the right is said to have progressed well, the Sixth Army next to it on its left only took the enemy front line trenches; but where the Third Army attacked, on the left of the latter's attack (which was nearly at right angles to the main attack), nothing at all seems to have been gained. Reports were at first very favourable. Later it was said 'enemy counter-attacked very strongly and ground gained was lost'. French claim 10,000 prisoners, but the attitude of French officers attached to my staff makes me think that they are not quite satisfied and that the much talked of victory has not been gained by the French up to date.

"It is a pity that Nivelle was so very optimistic as regards breaking the enemy's line."

The next morning Henry Wilson wrote, "I came to the conclusion after watching the thing for hours and after hours of telescope that the bit of line from the Fort of Condé up to Thoyon (on the Chemin des Dames) is simply impossible so long as the Boches' morale remains good enough to fight, and I don't think therefore that it ought to have been attacked. You know the country well but you can scarcely imagine what the Boches have done to strengthen it in 2½ years.



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"There is no doubt, to my mind, that the whole of the 6th Army attack has been a dead failure. The 5th Army on the other hand got on much better and Nivelle intends to exploit that as much as he can, but of course this will take him rather N.E. than N. or N.W. . . . G.Q.G. is disappointed."

For three more days the French attack continued and the results achieved were not inconsiderable. If the battle had been judged by the same standard as previous engagements it would not have been accounted a failure. Despite such fearful weather conditions—blizzards of snow in the middle of April—as might have confirmed the enemy's belief in the German nationality of the Almighty, much territory was gained at the cost of casualties that were not excessive. But the French Government, the French people and the French Army had for four months been taught to expect something more from this battle than a mere alteration in the front line and a quantity of prisoners. They had been promised nothing less than complete victory, and it already was apparent that the promise could not be kept. Haig rightly feared that the result would be a great reinforcement for that school of thought which believed in marking time until the Americans could take the field. On the 18th of April he wrote, "I must say at once that it would be the height of folly for the French to stop now, just when the Germans have committed the serious fault of retiring, meaning to avoid a battle, but have been forced to fight against their will. The enemy should be pressed everywhere without delay by all the Allies. If offensive operations are stopped in France, the enemy will be given time to recover from the blows he received on the Somme, at Verdun, Arras and now on the Aisne. He will also be able to transfer troops to other theatres which will call for counter-measures on our part. This will mean increased demand

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on our shipping and help the German in his submarine campaign. He would also have troops available for a threat against England."

Major-General Sir F. Maurice, who was then Director of Military Operations at the War Office, was staying at G.H.Q. that night. He was accompanying the Prime Minister on a visit to Paris and had been instructed to stop on his way in order to obtain Haig's views.

The following documents passed between them:

"F.M. C.-in-C.,

British Armies in France.

The Prime Minister to-day informed me that he had an interview with M. Thomas, the French Minister of Munitions, and that the latter had told him that the French War Cabinet was determined not to engage in prolonged fighting with the enemy, such as took place during the battle of the Somme, unless the French operations now in progress gave, during the first few days' fighting, a prospect of large material gains at an early date.

"The Prime Minister gave me to understand that the French Government view was that the state of French man power does not allow them to countenance very heavy losses, and that time was now in favour of the Entente, as it would allow the Russians to recover from the effect of the revolution and enable America to place large forces in the field.

"The Prime Minister expects to meet the French War Cabinet on Friday next, April 20th, and would like to know before then what, in your opinion, would be the effect of the French War Cabinet ordering General Nivelle to cease offensive operations at an early date.

F. Maurice,

Major-General

D.M.O.

for C.I.G.S."

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19th April, 1917.

“The Chief of the  
Imperial General Staff.

My reply to the question put to me in annexed is as follows:

“In my opinion the decision to cease offensive operations now, until Russia and America are in a position to join in, (probably not until next spring) would be most unwise.

“The struggle is following a normal course. Great results are never achieved in war until the enemy's resisting power has been broken, and against a powerful and determined enemy, operating with great numbers on wide fronts, this is a matter of time and hard fighting.

“The results so far attained this year show that we have already reduced considerably, by previous efforts, the enemy's resisting power. Our experiences in the last few days are highly encouraging. The present battle is proceeding very satisfactorily, and to abandon the good prospects of success now would be most discouraging to our armies and encouraging to the enemy, who would be left free to recover and reorganise and to seize the initiative either in this theatre or in another.

“Delay in forcing the issue would increase the danger to our shipping from submarines, and might result in the Allies being unable to exert their full strength next year.

“I consider that the prospects of success this year are distinctly good if we do not relax our efforts, and that it would be unwise, unsound and probably, in the long run, more costly in men and money to cease offensive operations at an early date.

“On the contrary, every effort should be made to induce all the allies to do their utmost now to co-operate with the

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main offensive in order to keep the enemy fully occupied everywhere, as agreed at the Chantilly conference last year.

D. H.  
Field Marshal,  
Commanding-in-Chief,  
British Armies in France."

On April 21st, "General Maurice wired from Paris saying that my note had been well received by the conference yesterday, and by Lloyd George, who changed his opinion as to the advisability of stopping the French attack."

The same day General Gemeau arrived at Haig's headquarters. "He gave me the French view of the situation. Nivelle, Micheler and G.Q.G. had planned to break through and reach Laon on the second day of the battle. Certain intermediate lines of various colours had been drawn, indicating objectives which would be occupied by the army as it progresses. The fact that hardly one of these objectives had been reached was in his opinion 'a check'. I pointed out that whilst one ought to make all arrangements for piercing the line and to advance beyond, it would be unsound to calculate on such a success as a certainty. Before we can 'exploit' a success, and 'pursue', we must first of all beat the enemy—with large hostile forces this must take a long time. In my opinion, the battle is taking a normal course. I showed him my note (addressed to C.I.G.S.) on the subject, and he quite agreed with my views, saying I had written as a soldier, and that the French Government had had the true military situation put to them by me."

On April 24th a meeting took place between Haig and Nivelle at Amiens. "Previous to the meeting I had a talk with Sir Henry Wilson, who told me of the difficulties under which Nivelle had to carry out his operations, on

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account of gossip and lack of confidence on the part of the President and of individual members of the Government, and jealousies on the part of rival French generals. If Nivelle is replaced by another, the latter will be in the same position as Nivelle in 2 months' time. I also received a wire from Esher from Paris saying 'strong determination on the part of Minister of War to make radical changes in high command'. . . . Nivelle arrived at the rue Gloriette (where I had reserved a quiet house for our meeting) with a number of officers, including Generals Pont (his Chief of Staff), Franchet d'Esperey (commanding Northern Army Group), des Vallières, Colonel d'Alençon and others. I thought it best to have a private talk with Nivelle alone first of all, so we went to a small room upstairs by ourselves, and I put my view of the situation to him. Briefly my points were as follows:

"(1) The French Government had told the British Prime Minister that, if a distinct success were not obtained in the first few days of attack on the Aisne, they intended to stop the offensive.

"(2) In view of submarine campaign it was most necessary to clear the Belgian ports soon, at any rate before autumn.

"(3) This could be done either directly by operating from Ypres—or indirectly by operating towards Charleroi-Liège.

"(4) We are at present carrying out the latter plan, and I am prepared to use every effort to break the Hindenburg line and take Cambrai. But, for this to be successful, the continued action of the French Army is essential.

"(5) I requested him to assure me that the French armies would continue to operate energetically, because what I feared was that, after the British Army had exhausted itself in trying to make Nivelle's plan a success, the French

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Government might stop the operations. I would then not be able to give effect to the other plan, viz. that of directly capturing the northern ports.

"Nivelle assured me that neither he nor his Government had any intention of stopping the offensive. He then told me his plan, which was to continue operations on the Aisne until Rheims was safe, and that he would place an army of reserve on Franchet's left rear, which would be available to support me too if required. Franchet would also be given many more guns.

"I pointed out the advantage of an attack on a wide front when I attacked the Drocourt-Quéant line, and also south of the Bapaume-Cambrai road. I suggested that the French should attack on each side of St. Quentin, and for this should take over some ground on Rawlinson's right.

"Nivelle thought this was a good idea, but suggested Rawlinson should make emplacements for his guns. I regretted I had not the labour, but would give him khaki jackets for his men to wear, in order to deceive the German observers. He readily agreed to my point of view, and said he would talk to Franchet and give him the necessary orders. The French First Army and adequate heavy guns would be sent him as soon as possible.

"I said we would be ready in three weeks.

"I got to my headquarters about 7.30 and gave Gemeau a letter to take to Nivelle with a copy of my recommendations of 19th April to C.I.G.S. so that Nivelle can address a similar note to his Government.

"Lieut.-Colonel Buchan (now in charge of Information Office under Prime Minister) came to dinner. He is anxious that Milner, Lloyd George and I should work in the closest touch possible. I told him that I am trying to work in harmony with Lloyd George, but he has such strange ideas on warfare!"

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While Nivelle was thus discussing the future and committing himself and his Government to continue the fight, he must have already had some suspicion that his days as Commander-in-Chief were numbered. The following evening Haig received a telephone message from Paris. The French Prime Minister and Minister of War wished to see him urgently. The next morning "I left at 9 a.m. by motor for Paris. We lunched in the Chantilly woods on the way and got to Hôtel Crillon about 2.30 p.m. Here I found a French staff officer and our military attaché (Colonel Leroy Lewis) waiting for me. I saw they were full of excitement, and I was asked to go at once to see Painlevé at the War Office before I met M. Ribot at 3 p.m. at the Quai d'Orsay. But I was to go and see Painlevé on my own inspiration, on no account was I to say that he had asked me to call on him. I of course acquiesced in this little French way of doing things.

"M. Painlevé was delighted to see me, but he appeared quite excited, and from his conversation I gathered that he had persuaded himself that the French had been beaten on the Aisne. He assured me that whatever happened the French Government would loyally discharge their duties towards the British Army, that there would be no change of plan, and that the offensive would be maintained. I gathered, however, that he wished to replace Nivelle by Pétain. I told him of the plan agreed upon between Nivelle and myself regarding clearing the Belgian coast before winter. He stated definitely that there would be no delay in carrying it out. Painlevé was evidently anxious that I should urge dismissal of Nivelle, hence his desire to see me before I saw the Prime Minister.

"At 3 p.m. I saw M. Ribot at the Quai d'Orsay. He is a tall old man of eighty years of age. A dear old thing, but I should think too old to deal with these tricky French poli-

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ticians. He told me of the jealousies existing amongst their generals, of the mutual complaints made regarding their last attacks on the Aisne and in Champagne. Already 95,000 wounded have passed through their casualty hospitals, and he presumed there would be over 115,000 casualties. He stated that in his opinion this was no time for making a change in the command. He asked my opinion. I said any change in command during a battle was to be deprecated, that I had no knowledge of what Nivelle was supposed to have failed in, but that I was delighted to work with any General whom the French Government appointed as their Commander-in-Chief. He asked me about Pétain's merits, but I of course could not discuss this. I said I knew him very slightly and had not had any opportunity of judging his military qualities.

"I asked him if I could assure my Government that there was no intention to stop operations or modify the present plans agreed upon. He begged me in the strongest way possible to tell my Government there will be no change made in the execution of plans, and that nothing had yet been decided about Nivelle; he personally thought that Nivelle should remain on.

"I left him three maps and a note giving our information regarding the state of the German reserves, their morale, supplies, difficulties from which they were suffering as to supply of men, etc. All this cheered the old man up and he was most grateful. I urged importance of the capture of St. Quentin and the piercing of the Hindenburg line as soon as possible. The old man fully concurred and said he would see M. Poincaré.

"On return to the hotel, I sent a telegram to Robertson and also wrote in the above sense to him.

". . . Sir H. Wilson was at the hotel. He seemed much excited over Nivelle's position, but was cheered at the re-



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sult of my interviews. He had urged me not to come to Paris because he feared that the French would use my name as recommending one or other general for the post of Commander-in-Chief. I told him my only anxiety and desire was to insist on the French going on with the operations without any delay. I could give no opinion regarding the choice of a general as French Commander-in-Chief.

"I walked with General Davidson and Philip Sassoon in the Bois. On return to the hotel about 7 p.m. I found an invitation to dine with the Minister of War. So Philip saw Painlevé's A.D.C. at once and made my excuses, and we dined quietly at the hotel. Lord Esher came to dinner.

"Quite a busy day, but I feel that I have in some way given confidence in victory to both Painlevé and Ribot; and I have not lessened their confidence in Nivelle."

Haig had a further interview with Painlevé on the 27th, when he found him "much quieter and steadier. I asked him definitely, can I rely on the French Army to go on with the preparations for an attack on my right as agreed between Nivelle and myself? He assured me that there will be no change of plan in any respect. . . .

"Altogether my visit, I think, has been fruitful, and I left the Minister of War much more confident of ultimate victory than when I saw him yesterday. At the same time, I do not wish my relations to become very close with the French Minister of War, because, in order that our field operations may be successful, it is essential that I should work in closely with the French Commander-in-Chief and the G.Q.G. In other words, to be on good terms with the French Higher Command, and not with the French politicians.

". . . Telegram from C.I.G.S. asking why French Premier had wanted to see me. The real reason was that he was anxious about the French military situation, and wished to have my views both as to the situation and on some tech-

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nical points. I did not tell him of my suspicions that Painlevé wished me to support him in his desire to get rid of Nivelle."

The irony of the situation was sublime. Two months earlier the French Government, with the enthusiastic support of the British Prime Minister, had been seeking to compel the British Commander-in-Chief to become a mere automaton under the inspired guidance of his more gifted French colleague. Now the French Minister of War was almost on his knees to that same British Commander-in-Chief to furnish him with material that might help him to get rid of that same French colleague.

And in every respect events had vindicated the opinions of Haig, justified his doubts and proved his prescience. He had believed in the methods of the Somme, continuous attacks and limited objectives. So far as he had put those methods into operation he had been conspicuously successful. More, in fact, had been and was still being accomplished in the fighting before Arras than could be claimed for any similar period in the Battle of the Somme. If these attacks had been delivered earlier in the year, as Haig and Joffre had intended, before the German withdrawal had been effected, it is impossible to say how much more important the results would have been. There are many historians, French and English, who believe that they might have proved decisive.

But Haig had loyally accepted the decision of his Government and had loyally served the foreign general who had been placed over his head. Now that general had lost his glamour in the eyes of politicians and his own Government were hoping that Haig's testimony would assist them in effecting a change. Some men might have been tempted to pay out an old score, and might have yielded to or resisted the temptation, but to Haig the temptation simply

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did not occur. There is not a line in his private diary or in his intimate correspondence to suggest that the sudden reversal of positions ever struck him, or that he enjoyed the poetic justice of the situation. He had only one thought. If Nivelle remained the French would continue to attack; if he were removed they would stop. Therefore he was in favour of Nivelle remaining. The past was forgotten. Personal considerations did not exist. His one concern was to win the war. There was no room for thoughts of petty malice or of mean revenge in that high and honourable mind.

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Chapter XIX

THE GENESIS  
OF PASSCHENDAELE

For a long time, as has been seen, Haig's mind had been occupied with the conception of a campaign in the north. It was there that he had wished to attack in the summer of 1916, but the plight of Verdun and the insistence of Joffre had compelled him to alter his plan. Joffre's opposition, however, had only been temporary and had not been based on principle. On the 10th of December in the same year Haig had written in his diary:

“General des Vallières brought me a plan of operations which he had received from Chantilly dated 7th December. Its objective is the capture of the Belgian coast by a combined operation of British (Army and Fleet), French and Belgians all to be under a British general. This is practically the scheme at which I have aimed for the past twelve months. There are some slight modifications in the number of divisions to be employed. It is most satisfactory that General Joffre has at last come round to see the advantage of carrying out such an operation and has at last agreed that the Belgians and a French contingent should operate under me (or some other British general if circumstances require it). He also proposes that a section of my staff should be French in order to deal with the ‘services de l’arrière’ for the whole force. I had intended that this should be the main

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operation of the British in the coming summer. My difficulty, however, was to get the French Commander-in-Chief to view the situation in the same light as I do. Now this has been achieved, the rest of the preliminary arrangements can be proceeded with at once."

Almost immediately afterwards came the fall of Joffre. Nivelle succeeded him and all plans underwent a drastic change.

Now, not unnaturally, Haig's mind reverted to the scheme that from the first he had believed to be sound. Success on the Somme or before Arras could only make a dent in the enemy's line, and regain devastated fields or ruined villages. Success in Flanders, on the other hand, could threaten the enemy's flank and not only win the precious seaports of Zeebrugge and Ostend, but possibly drive the Germans from Belgium and deprive them of the most valuable bargaining asset they possessed. And now urgent necessity, dread of disaster from a new source, brought powerful reinforcement to the claims of strategy in favour of the northern campaign.

In February the German Government, reluctantly and at the bidding of naval and military advisers, had decided in favour of unrestricted submarine warfare. It was a counsel of despair, for it rendered the entry of the United States into the war almost a certainty. That those who adopted it were prepared to run this risk proves how experience on the Somme had convinced them that victory was no longer likely to be won on land. At the time of the decision on submarine warfare Russia was still a powerful factor in the field. If it had been postponed for a month or two it might never have been taken, but if it had succeeded, as its authors believed that it must, the intervention of America would have mattered little, for Great Britain would have been starved before the American troops could be trained; nor

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would there have been any vessels available to transport them to Europe.

Meanwhile the early stages of the submarine campaign were proving sufficiently successful to strike a chill to the hearts of those whose business it was to keep a reckoning of our shipping resources. The month of April was the worst of all. Out of every four ships that left these islands only three returned. On the 28th Robertson wrote to Haig, "The situation at sea is very serious indeed. It has never been so bad as at present, and Jellicoe almost daily announces it to be hopeless. There may soon be a serious shortage of food in this country, and this has to be taken into consideration in regard to all theatres of war. For us to stop fighting now would seem to be a confession of failure and would allow the enemy to do as he likes." And in another message he wrote, "It is futile in view of the situation on sea to be influenced by what America can do on land many months hence, if ever." Haig shared entirely Robertson's opinion and wrote in reply, "I think the time has nearly come for me to take up our 'alternative plan' in earnest, and to this end we should ask the French to relieve some of our divisions on our right while we relieve their divisions on the Belgian coast. But pressure on the German Army must not be relaxed in the meantime. This seems to me of first importance for the success of our plan."

In a memorandum dated the 1st of May Haig gave official expression to his views on the situation. The results of the British offensive had been highly satisfactory. The French also had achieved a great deal and inflicted heavy losses on the enemy, but, owing to the extravagant hopes they had been led to entertain, they were profoundly discouraged by the result. He was convinced they did not intend to pursue the offensive. The appointment of Pétain proved it. The British troops, 80,000 under establishment,

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could not successfully carry on the offensive alone, but if they abandoned it immediately, the effect on Russia and Italy, both reported to be about to attack, might be serious. Therefore he considered that a limited offensive, incurring the minimum of loss, should be maintained for two or three weeks. The French should be persuaded to do as much. As soon as Russia and Italy attacked, preparations should be pressed forward for the campaign in Flanders, owing to the urgent need to clear the Belgian coast during the summer. In that campaign the French must co-operate.

“The guiding principles on which my general scheme of action is based are those which have proved successful in war from time immemorial—viz. that the first step must always be to wear down the enemy’s power of resistance until he is so weakened that he will be unable to withstand a decisive blow; then to deliver the decisive blow; and, finally, to reap the fruits of victory.” Nivelle’s mistake had been that he had sought to deliver the decisive blow before the enemy’s power of resistance had been sufficiently worn down.

“Under the conditions I have stated success in this attempt is now, in my opinion, reasonably possible and would have valuable results on land and sea; while even if a full measure of success is not gained we shall be attacking the enemy on a front where he cannot refuse to fight, and where, therefore, our purpose of wearing him down can be given effect to, while even a partial success will considerably improve our defensive position in the Ypres salient and thus reduce the heavy wastage which must otherwise be expected to occur there next winter as in the past.”

During the first fortnight of May, Haig’s difficulties were considerably increased by uncertainty as to who was Commander-in-Chief of the French armies. At the end of April Pétain had been appointed to a position analogous to that

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of the British C.I.G.S. No such post had previously existed in France and the position of the French Minister of War had suffered from the lack of a highly placed military adviser and link with the Commander-in-Chief. Nivelle, however, remained with the troops and continued to hold the title of Commander-in-Chief until May 16th.

Haig lost no time in making the acquaintance of his new colleague. On May 2nd he motored to Paris and the following morning, "At 10 a.m. I called on General Pétain at his office in the Invalides. The same room as that in which I was received by General Joffre in June 1914 before the war. Pétain took over the duties of a new appointment yesterday, viz. Chief of the General Staff. Nivelle is practically outed, but for the present will receive orders from Pétain until some suitable post, probably Russia, will be found for him.

"I had a long talk with Pétain. He was Professor of Infantry Tactics at the French Staff College, and is a very capable soldier according to all accounts. I put my case, more or less as follows:

"Are we agreed on the principle that the enemy must first be worn out before a decisive attack is launched, and a pursuit begun?

"Next as to method. I aim at capturing and consolidating as much ground as can be prepared beforehand by our artillery, then to push on advanced guards. At the same time we bring forward guns in preparation for another advance. The advancing troops will probably soon be held up, but as the wearing out process of the enemy's forces continues, a moment will come when our advanced guards and cavalry will be able to progress for much longer distances until a real decision is reached.

"Then coming to my actual plan, I am disposing my troops on a front opposite the Drocourt-Quéant line and



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the Hindenburg line (as far south as St. Quentin), from which I can at once advance to the attack, if the French have the means, and the intention to continue their present plan.

"If they can't continue the battle, then we must evolve another plan. General Pétain showed me his last reports. According to these, there are to-day only 35,000 men in the depots to meet wastage. This, he said, must mean that each month one French division must disappear, unless the Americans can be induced to send over men to enlist in the French Army! Pétain has a scheme for this, however.

"Finally, I explained my plan, and stated that I hoped that the French could support me in two ways:

"(a) by relieving 6 British divisions and

"(b) by continuing to press the enemy and hold him on their front and so prevent his sending large reserves to meet the British attack.

"Pétain replied that he entirely agreed with my views and plans. The one difficulty was the question of effectives. But he would consider the question and let me have his reply in writing. He was anxious to do his utmost to help me in every possible way.

"I found him most clear headed and easy to discuss things with.

"... At 12.30 I went to the Ministry of War and lunched with M. Painlevé. General Pétain and Colonel Leroy Lewis were present. A party of four. The Ministry of War is a fine old building and the rooms reflect the glories of past grandeur and wealth.

"We had a most friendly party, and it was 2.20 before I came away.

"I motored with Alan Fletcher to Versailles and took a walk. I was back again by 6.15 p.m. and met General Nivelle, who called at the hotel to see me.

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“The poor fellow looked tired, but said he was glad that Pétain was now with the War Minister. The latter in his opinion was ‘absolument fou’! He assured me that he would do his utmost with the French authorities to help me to carry out my plan now that his had failed.

“Lloyd George and a party of 28 arrived about 8 p.m. as I was going to dinner.

“I dined with Sassoon and Fletcher at Café Voisin. No meat was served, but we had an excellent dinner off fish and various vegetables, etc.

“At 9.30 p.m. I saw the Prime Minister with General Robertson. The former is afraid that the French Government is not going to act offensively. He is here, he says, to press whatever plan Robertson and I decide on. Rather a changed attitude for him to adopt since the Calais conference!”

Corroborative evidence with regard to Lloyd George’s altered attitude is contained in a letter from Lord Esher dated April 21st. “Yesterday I spent some hours with Lloyd George, and we lunched on the balcony of the Crillon in the sunshine. He has entirely changed his point of view as to the respective merits of the chiefs of the Allied Army, their staffs, and powers of offence. It is almost comic to see how the balance has turned. For the moment I do not think *you* could do wrong. This instability of vision (if you can use such a phrase) is L.G.’s great weakness. With his tremendous vitality and indestructible spirit it is a source of danger. But luckily he never displays infirmity of purpose. He suffers from over-elasticity of mind which is a rare enough fault on the borderline between vice and virtue.”

On May 4th a military conference took place in the morning at Pétain’s office. Nivelle was present as well as Haig, Robertson, Maurice and Kiggell. Agreement was reached both as to continuing the present offensive so far as

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possible and also as to the forthcoming attack in the north. It was agreed that the British were to deliver the main attack and the French were to assist, both by taking over part of the British line and by attacking on their own front. It was further decided that the greatest secrecy should be observed and that even the respective Governments should only be acquainted with the main principles, but with no details in regard to the date or the place of any attack.

After luncheon with Ribot Haig walked with Lloyd George in the Champs Elysées before attending the conference at the Quai d'Orsay. "Great Britain was represented by Mr. Lloyd George, Lord Robert Cecil, with General Robertson, Admiral Jellicoe and myself; while for France were M. Ribot, M. Painlevé (Minister of War), Bourgeois, Admiral Lacaze, with Generals Pétain and Nivelle. The two generals agreed to and accepted a document drawn up by Robertson giving the results of this morning's meeting, to which all the generals gave their assent previously.

"Mr. Lloyd George made two excellent speeches in which he stated that he had no pretensions to be a strategist, that he left that to his military advisers; that I, as Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in France, had full power to attack where and when I thought best. He (L.G.) did not wish to know the plan, or where or when any attack would take place. Briefly, he wished the French Government to treat their commanders on the same lines. His speeches were quite excellent.

"M. Ribot replied and quite agreed, but mentioned the great losses of the French Army since the war began. M. Painlevé also spoke, and said that his views had been misinterpreted. He was all in favour of an offensive, but only differed from those who planned the last attacks in the question of methods of execution. He concurred in the

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necessity for putting in large attacks, but on wide fronts with limited objectives.

"The conference passed off in the most friendly spirit, and all stated that they were united in the determination to attack vigorously and carry on the war 'jusqu'au bout'."

After the conference Haig returned to his headquarters in a far happier frame of mind. Not only had the French undertaken to support him, but he felt also that he had for the first time the confidence of his own Prime Minister. How easily his generous nature forgave personal injury is proved by a letter that he wrote to his wife on the following day:

"I was very pleased with the way Lloyd George tackled the military problem at the conference in Paris yesterday. In fact, I have quite forgiven him his misdeeds up to date in return for the very generous words he said yesterday about the British forces in France, and the way in which he went for the French Government and insisted on *vigorous action*. He did well."

It is noticeable that his heart was won not by any compliments paid to himself but by the "very generous words about the British forces", words which came so easily to Lloyd George and so hard to Haig, but which on this occasion meant so much to the latter. Lloyd George stayed at headquarters on his return journey, and Haig wrote that they had got on "very well indeed", and that the Prime Minister had gone off "thoroughly delighted with his visit here". Unfortunately the reconciliation was of brief duration.

In order that Haig might now proceed with his plans it was necessary that the French should take over some 8,000 yards of his line on the right and should agree to his relieving the French corps on his left near the Belgian coast. So obscure was the position at this time with regard to the

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hierarchy of French generals that Haig found himself dealing with Pétain in regard to the former proposition and with Nivelle in regard to the latter.

“Nivelle”, wrote Henry Wilson, “is entirely in favour of carrying out your wishes both because he thinks it is right from the military point of view and also because ‘you were a loyal comrade to him during the execution of his plan and he was going to be the same to you during the execution of your plan’, but he is apparently meeting with opposition from Paris.” This was written on May 9th. By the 16th Nivelle had ceased to exercise any authority.

Between these dates Haig was surprised to receive the following letter from Henry Wilson:

“Dear Field Marshal,

I am sorry to trouble you with a personal matter at a time like this but I feel I would not be carrying out my compact with you—made in the middle of March in London—if I did not tell you quite frankly what I was thinking of.

“It seems to me that since April 24th when you had your last interview with General Nivelle at Amiens I have for some reason, which I cannot even guess at, lost your confidence. I say this in no spirit of complaint or of criticism but simply because it appears to me to be so, and I say it because from that day to this although the French High Command has been passing through, and is still passing through, a serious and a dangerous crisis you have never asked for my opinion nor called on me for assistance in any shape. Again I am not complaining but it seems to me that if I have not got your entire and absolute confidence and if I get the feeling that my opinion on the present French military situation and the prospects of the future are of no value to you, then the sooner I go back to England the better.

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“I can only add that you have had no more loyal subordinate than I have been since I came on your staff and I am more grieved than I can say to think that I have lost your confidence.

Very sincerely yours,  
Henry Wilson.”

Haig's reply was brief.

“My dear Henry,

Don't be a B.F.! I expect to see you here to-night. I would have asked you to come before but did not wish to bring you away from what seemed to me the most important work viz.: to get my requests for relief of troops, etc. accepted by our Allies.

Yours  
D. H.”

About this time Haig lost his Director General of Transportation, Eric Geddes, during whose sojourn in France order had been restored out of chaos and the problem had been solved which at one period had threatened to produce serious consequences. Haig wrote him a letter of farewell warmly thanking him for his services. Geddes replied:

“I received your letter of the 13th to-day. I am overwhelmed at your appreciation of our work. It is too generous because frankly it wasn't a difficult job given three things—1. Your confidence and support. 2. A free hand at home. 3. A few good men—and I had all 3 essentials. No. 1 gave me the co-operation and help of the armies in France and the rest was easy.

“The work is in good hands and I know of no reason why the anxieties of last winter need recur.

“It has been a great education and privilege to work in the Army and under the Chief I have so much admiration and affection for. One learns much and I saw in France only

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the fine manly spirit of loyalty and co-operation which brings out the best in a man. I have I feel left many friends in France and am proud to feel also that I can count the great Commander-in-Chief of the Army as one also.

"I am proud to have served him and won his approval of the work I have begun but which my imagination tells me is only begun. I see transportation not a rearward service but an integral part of the great fighting machine. It is becoming so to a limited extent already but its possibilities are untouched almost to-day. I see transportation not only the means of following an advance, but as you say the deciding element in a surprise attack. In these days of aerial observation it is the only important means left of suddenly hitting the enemy where he cannot successfully counter attack. I wish it had been my lot to be with you to the end but it was not and I must be content to have laid the foundation for others to build from.

"I cannot refrain from saying how glad I am that the worries and anxieties of the Calais conference time are past and I hope gone for ever. I admired the serenity with which you dealt with the situation. It revealed to me the great man I served to the best of my ability and I am glad that the fickle opinion of the public is beginning to appreciate his great value to the Empire at the present time.

"With great gratitude for all your goodness to me I am my dear Chief, Yours sincerely,

Eric Geddes."

On May 16th Haig drew up an official memorandum for the C.I.G.S. briefly outlining his plan of campaign. The main point was that he had decided to divide his "operations for the clearance of the Belgian coast into two phases, the first of which will aim only at capturing certain dominating positions in my immediate front, possession of which will be of considerable value subsequently whether

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for offensive or defensive purposes. Preparations for the execution of this first phase are well advanced and the action intended is of a definite and limited nature, in which a decision will be obtained on future days after the commencement of the attack.

"The second phase is intended to take place several weeks later and it will not be carried out unless the situation is sufficiently favourable when the time for it comes.

"It will be seen therefore that my arrangements commit me to no undue risks and can be modified to meet any developments in the situation."

On May 18th Haig held a conference with Pétain at Amiens. "I began by asking Pétain if he had the necessary authority to reply to the questions I had raised in my letter of the 5th May as the result of our conference in Paris on the 3rd and 4th instant. He replied in the affirmative, regretted delay in replying, but said he wished himself to deal with the matter. (Evidently he knew when I saw him in Paris that Nivelles was to go.)

"I then asked him straight 'Did the French intend to play their full part as promised at the Paris conference?' 'Could I rely on his wholehearted co-operation?' He was most outspoken and gave me full assurance that the French Army would fight and would support the British in every possible way.

"I then went into my plans, and gave him a copy of them with two maps.

"He replied to the questions given in my letter of the 5th May as follows: 'That I could take over the coast sector whenever I liked and dispose of the two French divisions thus relieved as I judged best.'

"He could not agree to relieve my troops south of Havrincourt as I had asked. Instead he would place a corps of four divisions to operate with the Belgians. These, along



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with the two divisions from the coast sector make a total of six French divisions to work with six Belgian divisions, i.e. 12 divisions. These would be under the King of the Belgians who would be given a French Chief of the Staff and a French commander of artillery.

“Pétain suggested either General Anthoine or General Hély d’Oissel for the post of Chief of the Staff. I could choose whichever I preferred. I left the selection to him. The Chief of the Staff will be ordered to carry out my instructions.

“As regards my request that the offensive should be kept up on the rest of the French front, especially about the 1st June, 1st July and 1st August and be maintained, he stated that he had in preparation four attacks on a considerable scale. One on a 25 kilometre front, another consisting of attacks on six and twelve kilometre fronts, respectively, and two other attacks. As regards dates, he will do his best to fit in with my wishes, and he recognised that the main effort is now to be made by the British, whilst the French act in support.

“As regards Pétain personally, I found him businesslike, knowledgeable and brief of speech.”

At this meeting Haig’s plan of attack north of the river Lys was carefully explained with maps to Pétain, who neither then nor at any future date expressed to Haig an unfavourable opinion with regard to it. In conversation with Henry Wilson, according to a letter from the latter, he doubted whether the distant objectives of Zeebrugge and Ostend would ever be attained, but no such misgivings were conveyed in the two letters which he addressed to Haig during this month.

The first one, dated May 23rd, begins:

“Monsieur le Maréchal

With reference to our interview of May 18th I have the honour to inform you that I am in agreement with

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you concerning the execution of the plan of operations explained in the scheme which you handed me at Amiens, except however with regard to the following points."

He then proceeded to enumerate four matters of detail, none of which could be described as of major importance.

On the 27th he wrote again. The King of the Belgians had decided that Belgian participation in the forthcoming offensive should be limited to an attack on Dixmude which should not be delivered until the main attack had made sufficient progress. He himself was to be the sole judge of when that moment had arrived.

"In these conditions", Pétain wrote, "we are obliged to modify the decisions taken on the 18th May at Amiens relative to the employment of French and Belgian troops and the organisation of the command."

The three main points were as follows: first, the British, French and Belgian armies are to have each their separate zone of attack—the British from Hooze to Boesinghe, the French from Boesinghe to Steenstraete and the Belgians opposite to Dixmude.

Second, the French force is to consist of an army of six divisions and to be placed under Haig's command. The Belgian Army, on the other hand, would remain under the command of their king, and Pétain went on to describe the part they would be expected to play.

Third, in view of the limited share that the Belgians would take in the battle, the forces acting on Haig's left would consist only of the French, and their share also would have to be somewhat restricted if they were expected to provide their own reliefs.

He further suggested that if Haig and he were in complete agreement a written understanding should be drawn up to which the Belgians should be a party.

Haig's comment on this letter was that it seemed "most

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satisfactory and indicates a desire to work wholeheartedly with me”.

On June 2nd he replied, agreeing in the main with all the suggestions put forward by Pétain. While, however, thanking him for proposing to put the French divisions under the British Commander-in-Chief he thought on the whole that it would be preferable “that the French Army should remain under your orders with general instructions from you to co-operate with the British forces in the attack, after agreement has been reached between you and myself as to the nature and scope of the operations to be taken by the French Army so co-operating. Matters of detail could then be arranged direct between the G.O.C. Fifth British Army, who will be in command of the British forces on the Hooge-Boesinghe front and the G.O.C. French Army.”

Before final agreement was reached on these details distressing intelligence was brought to Haig's headquarters by General Debeney, who arrived there on June 2nd with a letter from Pétain authorising him to lay the whole situation of the French Army before Haig and to conceal nothing. How much was communicated in the interview that followed is uncertain. Debeney may have hesitated, for reasons easily understood, to speak of mutinies, or Haig may have hesitated to entrust such information even to the pages of his diary. All he records is that Debeney stated that the French soldiers were dissatisfied because leave had been so long suspended, that leave must be reopened at once, and that this would prevent Pétain from fulfilling his promise to attack on June 10th.

Haig accepted the inevitable philosophically and continued his preparations for the first phase of his campaign. This was to take the form of an attack upon the Messines ridge to be undertaken by the Second Army under Plumer.

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On the 22nd and 23rd of May Haig had visited their headquarters and had been most favourably impressed both by Plumer and by Harington, his Chief of Staff. He had driven from one corps to another and had talked with the divisional as well as the corps commanders and with many of the brigadiers. He had carefully inspected the plans of each and had occasionally made criticisms or offered suggestions.

On June 6th, the eve of the attack, he visited them again. "I left Blendecques about 11 a.m. with General Butler and Major Thompson. I visited hqrs. Second Army at Cassel and saw General Plumer. I went round the offices with him and shook hands with the principal staff officers, and wished them luck in to-morrow's attack.

"All seemed very pleased and confident. I thanked Plumer for the thorough methodical manner in which he had made his preparations for the attack, and I wished him success.

"At Bailleul I saw General Godley, commanding II Australian Corps, and his staff. All were full of confidence.

"It was now past 1 o'clock, so we halted for lunch on the top of Mont Rouge, where a hut with telescope had been arranged for me to use on the days of the battle.

"About 2.30 I called at hqrs. IX Corps and saw General Hamilton Gordon. He and his staff seemed in excellent form. Thence I went to Abeele and saw General Morland, commanding X Corps. The same confident feeling prevailed here.

"Subsequently I visited hqrs. VIII Corps (Hunter-Weston). I saw Brig.-General Ward, the C.R.A., who has done excellent work in pushing his guns forward. Before Ward arrived, 3 weeks ago, the attitude of this corps was too defensive, and guns were too far back.

"At Château Lovie I saw General H. Gough. The head-

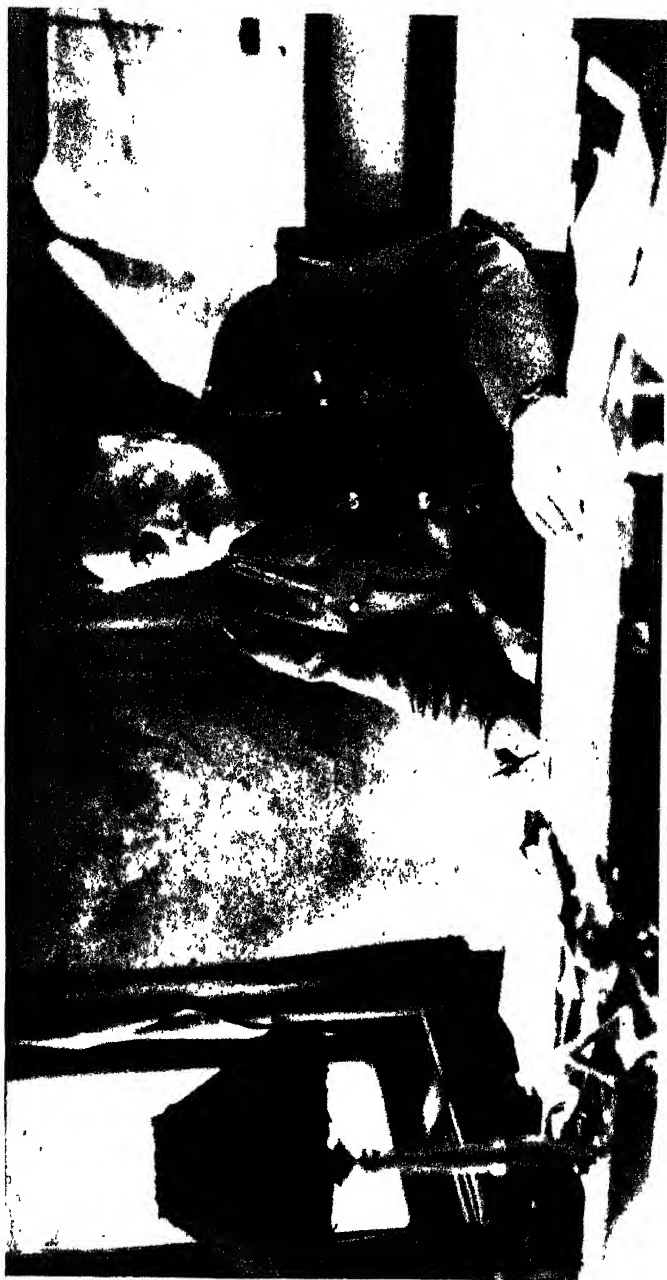
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quarters of Fifth Army is now here. He is delighted with his palatial residence after nearly a year in a smelly farm at Toutencourt. He says all the corps commanders are anxious to get to work at once in preparing for the attack. I told him it was necessary to wait for the results of General Plumer's operations against Messines. It was possible that we might be able to exploit our success quickly, and reach a position which would materially help his (Gough's) operations.

"Lastly I saw General Jacob (commanding II Corps) at Steenvoorde. He gave a good report of the 30th Division under Major-General W. de L. Williams, and said he was ready to exploit the success of the Wytschaete operations on the first opportunity. Williams will push forward patrols at zero, and if they do not get into the enemy's trenches there, they will try again later on.

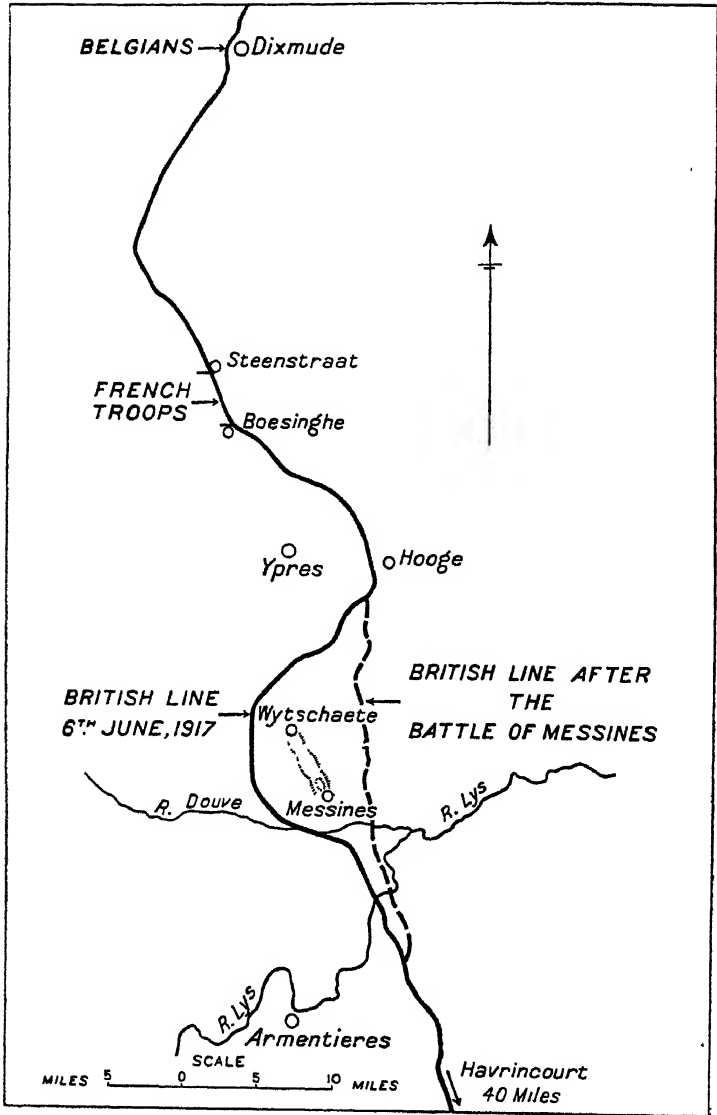
"I reached my train about 6 p.m. It is on a siding specially made for it about one mile north-east of Godewaersvelde and concealed from air observation. The train is arranged to take a limited number of officers for an advanced headquarters. It was made by the L. & N.W. Railway out of old North London Railway rolling stock, but is most comfortable."

Despite the comfort of his quarters it is doubtful whether Haig enjoyed much sleep that night. In the early part of it rain fell heavily accompanied by thunder, but towards midnight the sky cleared and at half-past two the moon was shining through a slight haze. At ten minutes past three, as the dawn was breaking, the air was shaken by the crash of such an explosion as the work of man had never before produced on the face of the earth. Two years of patient, dangerous labour underground, five miles of tunnelled galleries, nineteen separate mines charged with nearly a million pounds of high explosive had contributed to the



HAIG IN HIS HEADQUARTERS TRAIN  
*Imperial War Museum photograph. Copyright Reserved*

BATTLE OF  
MESSINES - WYTSCHAETE RIDGE  
JUNE, 1917.



MAP 3

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preparation of that awful moment. And simultaneously every gun along that sector of the British front, over 2,500, opened fire upon the enemy's position. Behind that barrage, deafened by that thunder, the infantry advanced to the attack.

The confidence of Plumer and the other officers of the Second Army had not been misplaced. The Battle of Messines was the most perfectly planned and successfully conducted operation in the whole war. All through that morning of June 7th tidings of victory flowed in to Haig's temporary headquarters in the train. This time there was no exception, no hold up, no setback, no counter-attack recovering ground previously occupied.

In the afternoon Haig visited Plumer to congratulate him. "The old man", he wrote, "deserves the highest praise, for he has patiently defended the Ypres salient for two and a half years, and he well knows that pressure has been brought to bear on me to remove him from the command of the Second Army. I left him about 5 p.m. Before I came away he had received news of the capture of the Oostaverne line", his final objective.

"The capture of the Messines-Wytschaete ridge is without doubt a great feat. An officer prisoner, taken at Messines, said that the German command never imagined we would attack Wytschaete on account of its strength. The 'Jägers', he said, 'had been posted there to hold it at all costs'. He said the place was 'impregnable'. Great was his astonishment when he saw batches of prisoners of these very Jägers being marched into the cage where he was. 'Then', he said, 'the ridge is lost and we can never retake it now'."

The same evening, "I met General Pétain in his train at Cassel station. He had seen the King of the Belgians this morning, and was on his way back to Compiègne. Our



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interview was most satisfactory. General Rucquoy was also present, as representing the King of the Belgians. Pétain brought a document embodying the points already agreed upon between us by correspondence regarding the forthcoming operations in Flanders. This document or 'protocol' was read aloud by me and was finally signed by the three of us. It placed the French six divisions entirely under my orders, appointed General Anthoine to command them, and left all points remaining in doubt to be decided by me. Altogether I found Pétain most anxious to help in every way and thoroughly businesslike.

"Pétain and I then had a private talk. He told me that two French divisions had refused to go and relieve two divisions in the front line, because the men had not had leave. Some were tried and were shot. The French Government supported Pétain. They also refused to allow the leading French socialists to go to Stockholm for a conference with German socialists. The situation in the French Army was serious at one moment, but it is now more satisfactory. But the bad state of discipline causes Pétain grave concern.

"General Allenby came to dinner to say good-bye before leaving to take up the Egyptian command." He was succeeded by General Byng in command of the Third Army.

The first phase of the northern campaign having now been accomplished with brilliant success, all Haig's energies were directed towards preparing for the second. That this, like every operation on the western front, was being undertaken with the full approval of the French goes without saying, but as the definite statement has been made that General Pétain was opposed to the plan it is worth recording that the only ways in which this offensive differed from others in its inception were that six French divisions were at Pétain's special request put directly under Haig's command and that the assent of the French Commander-in-

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Chief to the whole project was officially recorded in a signed convention.

As it has further been alleged by the same authority that Gough and Plumer were opposed to the plan, it may be stated that General Gough has himself denied the statement and that Haig's diary has described him on June 6th as eagerly looking forward to preparations for the attack. No evidence whatever has been brought forward to support the allegation so far as it applies to Plumer, and General Harington, then his Chief of Staff and now his biographer, is not aware that any exists. He further asserts definitely that Plumer "welcomed and endorsed the plan", supported it loyally from first to last, and was bitterly disappointed when he was transferred from Flanders to the Italian front.<sup>1</sup>

Undoubtedly the spectacular success of Messines raised the hopes of every officer on the western front. No position could be more strongly held, and therefore no position could resist determined attack; although it had to be remembered that the opportunity for such a lengthy period of preparation was not likely to occur again. But while hopes were rising in Flanders they began to flag in London, where the restless spirit of Lloyd George was growing suspicious of accepted methods and impatient for spectacular results which would justify in the eyes of the public the confidence they had reposed in him.

On June 12th Haig drew up a memorandum describing the situation as he saw it. Summing up his conclusions he wrote, "It is my considered opinion, based not on mere optimism but on a thorough study of the situation, guided by experience which I may claim to be considerable, that if our resources are concentrated in France to the fullest possible extent the British armies are capable and can be relied on to effect great results this summer—results which

<sup>1</sup>See *Plumer of Messines*, by General Sir Charles Harington, pp. 109, 134.

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will make final victory more assured and which may even bring it within reach this year.

“On the other hand I am equally convinced that to fail in concentrating our resources in the western theatre, or to divert them from it, would be most dangerous. It might lead to the collapse of France. It would certainly encourage Germany. And it would discourage our own officers and men very considerably.”

The very fact that Russia's continued participation in the war was doubtful rendered it the more important to strike hard in the west before the German troops which were still on the Russian frontier could be transferred. Success in the west might also produce a favourable effect on Russian policy.

“In conclusion, I desire to make it clear that, whatever force may be placed at my disposal, my undertaking will be limited to what it is reasonably possible to succeed in.

“Given sufficient force, provided no great transfer of German troops is made, in time, from east to west, it is probable that the Belgian coast could be cleared this summer and the defeats of the German troops entailed in doing so might quite possibly lead to their collapse.”

Haig's plan had from the first depended for success upon assistance from the sea, and Admiral Bacon, commanding the Dover Patrol, who had always supported it with enthusiasm, was now a frequent visitor at G.H.Q. At a conference of army commanders on June 14th Haig outlined the main features of his future policy—“I stated that there was no departure from the plans I had outlined at the conference of 7th May, viz. the British and French will wear down and exhaust the enemy by attacking (by surprise as far as possible) at points where an attack is not expected. Finally, the British will strike the main blow, probably in the north.

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“Underlying the general intention of wearing out the enemy is the strategical idea of securing the Belgian coast and connecting our front with the Dutch frontier.

“The nature and size of the several steps which we take towards that objective must depend on our *effectives* and the replacement of *guns*.

“Roughly these steps are:

“(a) Capture the bridgehead formed by the Passchendaele-Staden-Clercken ridge.

“(b) Push on towards Roulers-Thourout, so as to take the German coast defences in the rear.

“(c) Land by surprise on the Ostend front in conjunction with an attack from Nieuport.

“If our *effectives* or *guns* are inadequate, and progress is delayed, it may be necessary to call a halt after (a) is gained.

“Meantime, it is desirable to mislead the enemy as to our next point of attack. With this end in view, the Second Army will operate towards Comines and clear the triangle between the Comines canal and the river Lys so as to give the impression of the intention to turn Lille on the north, while our First Army operates against Lens with a view to turning Lille on the south. Secrecy is most important, but it is difficult to conceal preparations on so large a scale. The best plan seems to be to prepare simultaneously several points for attack: thus the situation becomes similar to the case of the pea under one of three thimbles.”

On June 17th Haig travelled to England and spent ten busy days in London, during which he lived in a new home that Lady Haig had prepared for him on Kingston Hill. On the 18th he had a satisfactory conference with Jellicoe and Bacon, and on the 19th he attended a meeting of the War Cabinet. Besides the Prime Minister there were present Bonar Law, Curzon, Milner, Smuts and Robertson—also, of course, Colonel Hankey, the Cabinet Secretary.

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"We discussed the military situation till 1 o'clock when the Prime Minister left to marry his daughter. The members of the War Cabinet asked me numerous questions, all tending to show that each of them was more pessimistic than the other! The Prime Minister seemed to believe the decisive moment of the war would be 1918. Until then we ought to husband our forces and do little or nothing, except support Italy with guns and gunners (300 batteries was the figure indicated). I strongly asserted that Germany was nearer her end than they seemed to think; that *now* was the favourable moment for pressing her and that everything possible should be done to take advantage of it by concentrating on the western front *all* available resources.

"I stated that Germany was within six months of the total exhaustion of her available man power, *if the fighting continues at its present intensity*. To do this, more men and guns are necessary.

"Doris and I lunched with Philip at his house in Park Lane. At 2.30 p.m. I had a talk with Sir William Robertson at the War Office, and at 3 p.m. called on General Smuts by appointment at 2 Whitehall Gardens. I was with him till 4 p.m. He does not know a great deal about strategy, but is anxious to support Robertson and myself. The Prime Minister, he said, was afraid that my plan would exhaust the British Army by the winter, and without gaining victory."

On the following day, June 20th, Haig attended another meeting of the War Policy Committee and it was on this occasion that a statement was made which was to affect profoundly the future conduct of the war and was to prove the determining factor in the control of Haig's policy during the next six months. Haig does not record it in the general record of the day's events but adds it as a special note, headed "Secret".

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“A most serious and startling situation was disclosed to-day. At to-day’s conference Admiral Jellicoe, as First Sea Lord, stated that owing to the great shortage of shipping due to German submarines it would be impossible for Great Britain to continue the war in 1918. This was a bombshell for the Cabinet and all present. A full enquiry is to be made as to the real facts on which this opinion of the naval authorities is based. No one present shared Jellicoe’s view, and all seemed satisfied that the food reserves in Great Britain are adequate. Jellicoe’s words were: ‘There is no good discussing plans for next spring—we cannot go on.’ . . .”

Subsequently Haig told an intimate friend that Admiral Jellicoe had reinforced this opinion in private conversation. He had told Haig that “if the Army can’t get the Belgian coast ports the Navy can’t hold the Channel and the war is lost”. It was with this knowledge in his mind, based on the opinion of so distinguished a sailor, that Haig persisted for so long in his fierce, obstinate struggle for the Belgian coast.

Apart from the danger of losing command of the Channel, which would indeed have meant the end of the war—and Haig could not have been justified in disregarding Jellicoe’s solemn warning—the next greatest menace in his and in Robertson’s opinion was the transference of a large number of troops to Italy which, as Lloyd George believed, would defeat Austria and thus knock away one of the props under Germany.

The danger of arguing by analogy is proverbial. If Austria, Turkey and Bulgaria had really been the props upon which the German Empire was resting it would have been wise policy to knock them away, but a moment’s reflection will show that they were nothing of the kind. They were rather—to pursue the architectural metaphor—ornamental pillars decorating the façade of a very solid building, and

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while their disappearance would have impaired its dignity it would hardly have caused its collapse.

Haig drew up a memorandum on the subject for submission to the Cabinet. In the following two paragraphs he summarised his conclusions.

“A decision to transfer troops to Italy would mean abandonment of our offensive in Belgium; a consequent gain of time to Germany; very dangerous disappointment in France and to some extent in Russia; small prospects of success against Austria—supported in all probability by German troops; a possibility of reverses on the western front; and a possibility of still more serious reverses on the Italian front.

“Against all this we have a reasonable chance of success in Belgium, which may have greater results than even a bigger success against Austria, and which at least may be expected to open the way for greater results subsequently.”

There was one further argument against the Italian policy, stronger than those that he put forward but which, even if it had been present to his mind, he could hardly have advanced. It has already been mentioned. Any troops that the Allies sent to fight on Italian soil would have had to come under the control of the Italian High Command. That same High Command was through its own incompetence to be generally considered responsible within the next six months for the greatest disaster which occurred on the allied front throughout the war. Can it be supposed that large reinforcements from the Allies would have averted that disaster? Movements of troops in such quantities cannot be concealed. It was far easier for Germany to reinforce Austria than for Great Britain to reinforce Italy. We may be certain that for every French or English soldier sent to Italy the equivalent at least would have been sent from Germany to Austria. But there would have been this im-

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portant difference: Germany was so much the senior partner in her alliance that where she sent her men she dictated her methods. Austria would have been reinforced not only with German troops but also with German staff work and probably with German supreme command, and we can only be thankful that Lloyd George, whose faith in foreign commanders appeared unshaken by the failure of Nivelle, did not succeed in his endeavour to send British troops under the command of Cadorna to fight against so formidable a foe.

On June 21st there was a further meeting of the War Cabinet which Haig attended. "Lloyd George made a long oration, minimising the successes gained, and exaggerating the strength of the enemy. His object was to induce Robertson and myself to agree to an expedition being sent to support the Italians. It was a regular lawyer's effort to make black appear white! He referred with a sneer to my optimistic views. I told him that war could not be won by arithmetic and that the British Army being in touch with the enemy was able to realise how much the latter's morale has decreased. L.G. stated also that he had grave misgivings as to the correctness of the advice given by the military advisers of the Government. 'Robertson', he said, 'had changed his opinions.'

"The Prime Minister so insisted on sending an expedition to Italy that I thought he had already promised support to the Italians. Finally, he requested Robertson and myself to think carefully over the views he had expressed, and then to submit a further report by Monday."

Lloyd George was perhaps, from his own point of view, unwise to ask Haig and Robertson to submit further reports. Both could express themselves on paper far more efficiently than in the council chamber, and on this particular matter they had both thought so deeply and so long



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that they produced statements which were difficult to answer. Even Lloyd George, with genuine doubt still in his heart, was compelled to bow to them.

On Monday, June 25th, the War Cabinet met again. "Lloyd George said that he was much pleased with my note. On the other hand, he criticised Robertson and tried to get a more definite statement of his views out of him as to the result which he expected. Robertson would not budge. All he would say was that my plan was the only thing to do. Eventually it was decided that I am to go on with my preparations; that in two weeks M. Albert Thomas (who is in favour of my plan) will report on the state of feeling in France and what the French Army can do. The British Government will then meet the French Government and decide on the extent of our operations."

Haig returned to France on the 27th, but before he left two incidents occurred which should be recorded. The first was an offer by Lord Derby to recommend him for a peerage. He had no son at this time and the offer made little appeal to him. At Lord Derby's request he put his refusal into writing.

"My dear Derby,

As desired by you, I now reply in writing to the question which you were good enough to put to me this morning.

"I feel that you have done me a very great honour by offering to recommend me for a peerage. And, since I saw you, I have thought most carefully over the matter. I value, more than I can say, your great kindness in wishing to put my name forward for so high a distinction. I am also fully alive to the great debt which I owe to my subordinates of all ranks in the forces in France for all our successes, and I realise that in honouring me, their commander, you are in

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a way honouring the whole Army. Still I feel that it is best for me to remain as I am, for the personal reasons which I mentioned to you this morning.

“With renewed thanks for your kindness in thinking of the desirability of rewarding me *at all*,

Believe me,

Yours very truly,

D. Haig.”

The other incident was a reconciliation with Lord French which Haig had long desired. On the morning of the day he left London, he called at the Horse Guards where French, now Commander-in-Chief of the Home Forces, had his headquarters.

“I had not seen him since I said good-bye to him at St. Omer in December 1915, though I invited him once to visit the army in France, and also went to dine with Derby to meet him, but he did not turn up. He was very pleased to see me, and said that the order to give up his command in France came as a great blow to him and that he was so upset that he knew he thought and said and did things then which he now was ashamed of. He felt now that it was the best thing for the country that he had given up his command, because he was then in bad health and not fit to carry out the terrific duties which at that time rested upon him.

“I shook him by the hand and congratulated him on speaking out like a man.

“I invited him to France, and we parted the best of friends. I was with him for about half an hour.”

On Sunday, the 1st of July, Haig as usual attended the Church of Scotland at 9.30. The Rev. George Duncan preached from the text “Launch out into the deep”. Considering the great enterprise that filled his thoughts during this month of preparation the words might well

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have seemed to Haig fraught with a special message. But he was not prone to such imaginings and merely noted in his diary, "An excellent sermon which showed that the padre's leave to Scotland had done him good."

The same day Colonel de Bellaigue, who had succeeded General des Vallières as the head of the French mission, and who had recently returned from Compiègne, reported that "General Pétain had told Robertson that he is in full agreement with me regarding my proposed operations in France and Belgium; also that the French army will attend and support me 'to the fullest extent possible' during my operations." The views of the French Commander-in-Chief were shared by the President of the Republic and the Minister of War, both of whom visited British headquarters during the early days of July. Poincaré seemed to Haig "a worthy little man, extremely self-satisfied and rather unsympathetic and cold; a regular lawyer in fact. I had not seen him since September last in Paris yet he never referred to the great successes won by the British Army since we met. On the other hand he was profuse in his good wishes for the success of our future offensive."

Painlevé, on the other hand, he found "quick and intelligent and anxious to help me in every way possible. . . . He is entirely in agreement with me that the Allies should continue to press the enemy with the greatest energy on the western front, and he agrees that to send any detachment from here to Italy would be a dispersion of force, and so would constitute a fault of the worst kind. The same principles apply to our force of aeroplanes. To send back squadrons to England for the defence of London is to play the Germans' game."

The last remark was occasioned by the fact that a recent daylight aeroplane raid on London had created something like a panic, and the Government had demanded that two

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squadrons should be sent back from the front at once for the protection of the capital. This had occurred at a most unfortunate moment when Trenchard was in the act of developing a contest for air supremacy which Haig considered it most important to establish before the launching of his offensive.

On the same day as this demand, to which he was obliged to yield, there came a letter from Robertson stating that the "Prime Minister is more than ever keen on the Italian project! Several of the other members of the War Cabinet are equally keen on some other equally foolish strategical project. Alexandretta—the Balkans, for instance. Yet I suppose that these same Ministers will be held up in years to come as far-sighted statesmen and the saviours of their country!"

At the beginning of the month the King came to spend a few days in the war area and inhabited a house at Cassel where Haig had been accustomed to stay. Haig visited His Majesty on the evening of his arrival in order to see that all had been done to render him comfortable, and after a short interview was about to take his leave when to his great surprise the King presented him with the insignia of a Knight of the Thistle. He was genuinely and frankly delighted with this, the highest honour that a Scotsman can receive, and his pleasure was increased by the obvious satisfaction that the King had in handing it to him, and by the knowledge that the Duke of Buccleuch had declined to accept it until it had been bestowed upon the "greatest living Scotsman".

Throughout the month preparations continued, Haig being always anxious to hasten them, circumstances always conspiring to cause delay. As early as the 1st he learnt that General Anthoine, commanding the six French divisions, could not be ready on the date fixed, and that Gough

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wished to wait rather than modify his plans. As the delay was due to transport difficulties, Haig arranged for Anthoine to be given additional facilities, and directed that a plan should be made out for holding back the left of the Fifth Army while the right captured Gheluvelt ridge. The French troops were on the extreme left of the attacking force, the Fifth Army being on the left of the British contingent.

Again on the 7th Gough proposed a postponement of five days. Haig replied that it was still too early to fix a definite date as he wished first to gain supremacy in the air and to dominate the enemy's artillery, but that he was averse from delaying longer than absolutely necessary. Much would depend upon the weather, which was still fine, and upon taking the enemy unawares, which they were at present. Every day was of consequence.

On the 13th, after a conference at the headquarters of the Fifth Army, he agreed to postpone the infantry attack for three days. The bombardment, however, was still to begin on the 15th as previously arranged. This decision gave great satisfaction to General Anthoine, who said that "if all went well and the weather was satisfactory, he hoped to be quite ready by then and that in any case his artillery would begin firing on the 15th".

The bombardment began as arranged, but there was further delay before the infantry attack took place and, as usual, the French were the cause of it.

On July 25th, "At 9.45 General Gough came to see me. All preparations are ready and he is anxious to stick to our date and attack on the 28th. If the French are not ready he thought it would be better to wait two or three days for them than to change our plan at the last minute. I agreed.

"At 10 a.m. I received General Anthoine, commanding French First Army. Owing to dull weather, observation

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had been bad and only  $2\frac{1}{2}$  'days of fire' had been expended instead of '7 days of fire'. I put the disadvantages of delay to him, but he was determined to have three more days of counter-battery work. So I had to choose between acquiescing with him or ordering him to attack on the 28th before the French are ready. For the future good relations of our two armies it is necessary to give the French every possible chance of gaining a big success this time. Also the present excited feeling in France would not brook a failure at this moment. So I agreed to put off the infantry attack for three days. I then saw Gough again and told him of my decision. He agreed that three days' delay was our best policy."

Meanwhile on the 19th, three days after the bombardment had begun, Haig received a letter from Robertson in which it was stated that hitherto no official approval of his plans had been given, but he hoped that it might be forthcoming in a day or two. Haig was naturally indignant that he should have been allowed to commit himself and his army so far under the natural impression that the Cabinet's mind was made up, while in fact it was still vacillating. "The members of the Cabinet", he wrote, "evidently do not understand what is entailed by preparation for attack under existing circumstances, or what the effect—material and moral—would be of altering plans once preparations are in full swing. It may not be possible for the War Cabinet to realise it, but I hope you will be able to convey to them what a serious matter these preparations are, and how long beforehand they have to be commenced."

It was not until the evening of the 21st that he received a letter definitely conveying Cabinet approval, but even then it was expressed in such language as carried with it no accompaniment of confidence. On the 29th "I replied to a kind letter from Lord Derby in which he assured me of his

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friendship and support, and hoped that I would shift any additional worry on to his own and Robertson's shoulders. I told him I have not any doubt about him or Robertson supporting me. No worries on that score. What does cause me anxiety is that the Government do not give some *practical signs* that *they* have confidence in my plan! Something more than words is wanted. They should show they mean business by making an effort to concentrate all available resources at this, the decisive spot; at this, the decisive moment of the war; 18-pounders should be got from somewhere, and drafts provided in abundance, etc. Instead of this, reserves which we can ill spare are being sent to Italy."

Those who talked glibly about the desirability of unity of command, as between the Allies, failed to realise the far more pressing and urgent need of unity of mind and purpose among the responsible authorities of Great Britain. A platoon commander who before an attack allowed his non-commissioned officers to suspect that they had lost his confidence would rightly be condemned as unfit for his position. Nor can a Prime Minister be held guiltless, who on the eve of a great battle allows the impression to prevail that he distrusts the strategy of the whole campaign and doubts the capacity of his Commander-in-Chief.

## Chapter XX

# THE BATTLE OF PASSCHENDAELE

**B**efore we enter upon the grim story of the long battle which was now to be so fiercely fought upon the plains of Flanders it may be well to recapitulate the causes which rendered it imperative for the British Army to fight then and to fight there.

First comes the fact, which was not known at the time in England and which is still insufficiently appreciated, that the French Army, which had so heroically held the enemy at bay for three years, could no longer be relied upon. Haig, who had inherited the deep discretion of his race, and who was also bound by obligations of honour to his French colleague, forbore both in official dispatches and in private correspondence from referring to a secret that was fraught with such fearful danger. Had knowledge of it leaked out to the Germans, who heard nothing of it but the vaguest rumours, they would have been swift to take advantage of an opportunity which might actually have proved disastrous to the allied cause.

Haig, who had a lofty disregard for his own reputation during his lifetime, relying with quiet confidence on the verdict of history, seldom alluded, even when the danger was past, to this, one of the principal motives which at the time controlled his conduct. In a letter, however, which he wrote to General Charteris on March 5th, 1927, there



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occurs the following passage, "As to Winston's book, he asked me if he could publish a wire I sent him thanking him for good work done in matter of munitions. He mentioned that he had criticised me over the Passchendaele operations.

"I replied I did not care what criticisms he made as long as he clearly stated the facts, as far as it was possible to know them. He said he intended to do so, and thanked me for giving him the permission he asked. . . . It is impossible for Winston to know how the possibility of the French Army breaking up in 1917 *compelled me to go on attacking*. It was impossible to change sooner from the Ypres front to Cambrai without Pétain coming to press me not to leave the Germans alone for a week, on account of the *awful* state of the French troops! You even did not know the facts, as Pétain told them to me in confidence."

Charteris was his Chief Intelligence Officer at the time, yet even to Charteris Haig had not felt justified in repeating all that Pétain had told him. Far less would he have been willing to convey such perilous information in writing to London, whence there were too many dangerous channels through which it might escape.

It has been suggested that Haig was misinformed as to the condition of the French troops at this period, but it is hard to see what better information he could have obtained than that conveyed to him in strict confidence by the French Commander-in-Chief; or how he could have disregarded the appeals of one whose wishes he had been instructed by his own Government to carry out, so far as it was possible. That Pétain himself was sincere in the opinion he expressed is proved by the fact that although trench warfare in the Verdun area became intensified from the 20th August onwards, it was not, as will be seen, until the 23rd October that he dared to use his troops for an offensive, and then only on a comparatively minor scale.

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The second reason, which, if it had stood alone would in itself have been hardly less compelling, was the stark, unqualified affirmation of Admiral Jellicoe that unless the Belgian ports were captured the war could not go on. "It is no use making plans for 1918" had been his actual words. Others may have been more optimistic, but none spoke with greater authority. Jellicoe's opinion was reinforced by Admiral Bacon, commanding the Dover Patrol, who had written a paper in June in which he stated that Dunkirk would have to be abandoned as a main port unless Zeebrugge and Ostend could be taken before the winter. These statements meant nothing less than that Great Britain was faced by defeat abject, humiliating and immediate, and that, in the opinion of those best qualified to judge, such defeat could be averted only by a successful advance in Flanders.

Moreover, the plan which circumstances must have compelled him to adopt was one which he had long been contemplating with favour. Long before the submarine menace had materialised and while the French Army was still in the plenitude of its strength and efficiency, Haig had believed that the best place to attack was in Flanders, and had only been prevented by other circumstances from attacking there earlier.

The strategic advantages of such an attack, as has already been explained, were obvious. Nor was there any reason to suppose that the country, although low lying and marshy, would become impossible to fight upon. It is true, as many holiday makers have learnt to their sorrow, that there is frequently a break in the weather of north-western Europe at the beginning of August; but such breaks are by no means certain, and the weather conditions of August 1917 are mercifully rare. There were five Augusts during the war, of which two, those of 1914 and 1918, were fine and dry.

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Nor was it the fault of the British Commander-in-Chief that the attack was postponed until August. It has been seen how the whole year's time-table had been thrown out from the beginning by Nivelles, and how, until the very last moment, delays were occasioned, which Haig chafed at but could not control. A few weeks, or, as will appear, even a few days, might have made an immense difference to the ultimate achievement.

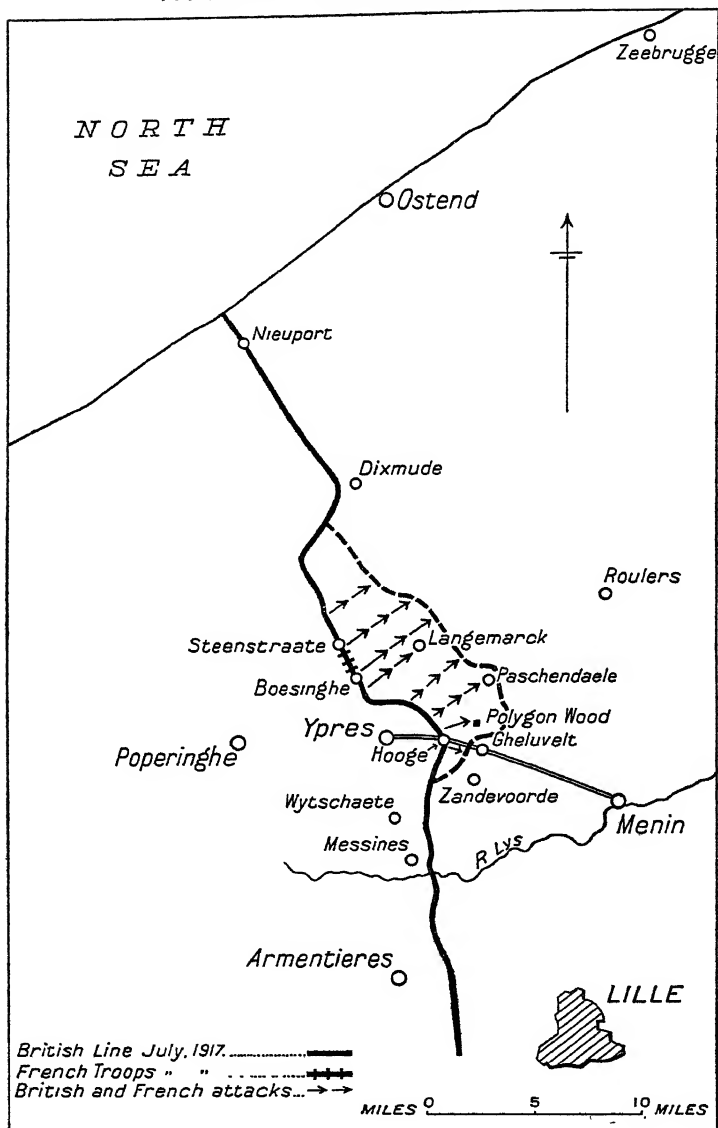
The statement, that even if the weather had remained fine, it would not have been possible to conduct successful operations in this particular part of the country, will not bear one moment's examination, for within exactly a year of the battle, and despite the fearful deterioration of the land owing to the fighting that had meanwhile taken place, another campaign was launched over the same territory with results that were completely and brilliantly successful. That the ground was in any case unsuitable for tank operations may be true, but, in estimating the importance of that fact, it is fair to recollect what was the prevalent military opinion of tanks in August 1917. The Army as a whole thought very little of them; the Australians even said that they would prefer to fight without them, and did so.<sup>1</sup> It has been seen that Haig had given a better welcome than any other senior officer to the new invention, and that he had been eager, perhaps only too eager, to make use of it; but to expect him to abandon, at this date, a carefully prepared scheme of attack on the sole ground that the territory was ill adapted for tank warfare is to show a lack of historical perspective.

The Russian situation provided another powerful argument in favour of assuming the offensive without delay. Information as to conditions on that front was scanty, but that Russia would remain a combatant was still possible.

<sup>1</sup> See *Australian Official History*, 1917, p. 747.



# BATTLE OF PASSCHENDAELE AUGUST - NOVEMBER, 1917



MAP 4

## THE BATTLE OF PASSCHENDAELE

Even though the fighting value of her troops was reduced by indiscipline, the mere fact that she retained so many German divisions on her frontier rendered her continued presence in the field invaluable to the Allies. While her decision was yet uncertain nothing could be better calculated to affect it favourably than a successful advance in the west, which would raise hope of early victory.

If, on the other hand, hope of keeping Russia in the war had to be abandoned, then there was still stronger cause for striking in the west without delay, before Germany could transfer her troops from one frontier to the other.

These, then, were the arguments which were present to Haig's mind at the end of July in favour of delivering his attack in Flanders. From the beginning of the war he had believed that wise strategy must favour an attack in that district. For three months, with the approval of his Government, every preparation had been made for delivering such an attack. His generals, although the opposite has been asserted, were in favour of it. Junior officers and men had long known that it was coming and could only have interpreted its abandonment as a sign of weakness and inferiority. The international situation demanded it, for it was the last chance of keeping Russia in the war, and, if that were impossible, it was the last chance of hitting Germany hard before she could move reinforcements to the west as a result of Russia's defection. Finally, Haig was assured on the authority of the French Commander-in-Chief that he must fight in order to preserve the French Army, while at the same time he received from the Chief of the British Naval Staff an equally explicit assurance that he must fight, and fight in Flanders, in order to maintain British command of the sea and to save his country from surrender.

The plan which Haig had in his mind is briefly summarised in the "outline of possibilities" which he issued to his

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army commanders. He clearly foresaw "very hard fighting lasting perhaps for weeks" and he hoped as a first stage to secure the Passchendaele-Staden ridge. In the second stage, in which the Fourth Army and naval forces were to take part, he aimed at winning the line Thourout-Cockerlaere. On the first day, a bite about two miles deep and eight miles wide at the base was to be made in the enemy's front on the eastern side of Ypres; the main attack was to be carried out by nine divisions of Gough's Army, in the centre, covered on the right by five of Plumer's divisions and on the left by two of Anthoine's. The attack was to be made in three bounds, the first two of a thousand yards each and the third of fifteen hundred yards.

On the morning of the 31st July Haig was awakened at 4.15 by the sound of heavy firing. The ground on which his train stood was shaking on account of the terrific bombardment.

The day's diary always began with a weather report. To-day it ran, "Glass steady. Morning dull and coldish. The bright weather reported as coming is slower in its progress than expected by our weather prophet."

It was nearly seven before the first telephone messages began to arrive. On the whole they were satisfactory. There had been fierce fighting, but the primary objectives had been carried, large numbers of prisoners had been taken and British casualties were comparatively light. The French divisions on the left had been conspicuously successful, a fact to which Haig attached great importance, hoping that the report would improve the morale of the French Army as a whole.

In the afternoon he visited General Gough. "He had been to headquarters of XIX and II Corps. Fighting on our right had been most severe. This I had expected. Our divisions had made good progress and were on top of the ridge

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which the Menin road crosses, but had not advanced sufficiently eastwards to have observation into the valleys beyond. Further to the west, our troops had established themselves beyond the Steenbeck, and the French had taken Bixschoote and the Cabaret Kortakeer (which was so frequently attacked in October and November 1914). This was a fine day's work. Gough thinks he has taken over 5,000 prisoners and 60 guns or more. The ground is thick with dead Germans, killed mostly by our artillery. I sent Alan Fletcher and Colonel Ryan round the casualty clearing stations. They report many slight cases, mostly shell fire. Wounded are very cheery indeed. Some 6,000 wounded had been treated in ten hours up to 6 p.m." Actually the first objective was easily gained: the second also, except on the right of the Fifth Army: the third was reached only in the centre, but the Second Army and French First Army came up in line on right and left.

Haig's diary continues: "As regards future operations, I told Gough to continue to carry out the original plan; to consolidate ground gained and to improve his position, as he may deem necessary, for facilitating the next advance; the next advance will be made as soon as possible, *but only after adequate bombardment and after dominating the hostile artillery.*

"Heavy rain fell this afternoon and aeroplane observation was impossible. The going also became very bad, and the ground was much cut up. This has hampered our further progress and robbed us of much of the advantage due to our great success."

The heavy rain which fell that afternoon ceased only for a few hours in the evening. Early next morning it began again and thenceforward during four nights and days it continued to fall without intermission. Such an occurrence could not have been foreseen. Statistics may show that the



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total rainfall in this month of August has been surpassed in other years. It was not, however, the total rainfall that mattered, but the particular incidence of it. Had that four days' rainfall been spread over fourteen with intervals of wind and sunshine, the thirsty earth could have absorbed the water and there would have been no interference with the progress of the battle. As it was, dry ground temporarily became a marsh, and marshy ground became dangerous bogs, and bogs became deep ponds, so that the advancing troops were brought to a standstill. The substantial successes of the first day could not be exploited. The strong arm that had delivered one crashing blow was suddenly paralysed, and the keen eyes that had directed the blow could only look on with despair while the stricken foe collected himself, breathed again and recovered.

During the melancholy fortnight that followed there was all too little work to occupy the time of the Commander-in-Chief. But he did not waste time. He visited his army commanders, he discussed with them the situation, he studied the lessons to be derived from the most recent fighting and he inspected hospitals. The diary that he kept and the letters that he wrote during these days of enforced inactivity and bitter disappointment afford a remarkable example of equanimity in misfortune. There are no imprecations of providence, nor outbursts of chagrin.

Nor was the news that he received from London of a nature to comfort him. While the attack upon which he had fastened his hopes was being so maddeningly delayed, a conference was once more discussing the desirability of withdrawing troops from France to Italy. And this proposal, which was naturally welcome to the Italians, now appeared more formidable owing to the support it was receiving from the French. On August 9th Robertson wrote, "Unfortunately Lloyd George has got the French with him

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as well as the Italians. Foch is hopeless. I enclose some notes he gave me for my personal information, but which as a matter of fact he gave almost verbatim at the conference yesterday when called upon by Lloyd George to give his views as to what should be done in the event of Russia not being in a better position to help us later than she now is. Foch told me here that he thought the French troops might fight fairly well this year, but that it was very doubtful what they would do next. He seems to have made up his mind that it is hopeless looking for good results on the west front. This will make my task much harder."

It would be unfair to Foch to treat too seriously the notes to which Robertson referred. They were possibly thrown together in haste between the meetings of the conference with a view to clarifying the mind of the author before he was called upon to give his opinion. Certainly they do not combine to form an impressive document. Foch began by asserting that "if Germany, our principal enemy, cannot be reduced by direct pressure within a reasonable time, it may be preferable to seek to isolate her by forcing a separate peace on Austria, or Bulgaria, or Turkey, as a result of blows directed specially against those Powers. But it is to be understood that the preparation of such measures must in no way prejudice the solidity of our resistance on the British-French-Belgian front, which under all conditions is indispensable."

He then went on to examine the various possible campaigns against each of the three Powers in question without committing himself very enthusiastically to any of them. Haig, replying to Robertson's letter, wrote that he could hardly believe that it was really Foch who had produced such a feeble document. In the same letter he assured Robertson of his complete agreement with him on all military matters and added, "The only point on which I am

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not in accord with you is the desirability of issuing such pessimistic estimates from your Intelligence Branch. They do, I feel sure, much harm, and cause many in authority to take a pessimistic outlook, when a contrary view, based on equally good information, would go far to help the nation on to victory. Personally I feel we have every reason to be optimistic, and, if the war were to end to-morrow, Great Britain would find herself not merely the greatest Power in Europe, but in the world."

That he should have felt optimistic at such a moment proves how profound was his confidence in his own country, and that he should have enjoined optimism on Robertson shows how with him it was not merely a sentiment but a policy. Haig has been criticised for taking too hopeful a view, and it has been asserted that he was deceived by Charteris, who told him only what he wanted to hear; but this passage reveals his deliberate intention to give prominence to the more favourable aspects of any situation in order to strengthen the wills of those who needed a tonic.

A very slight improvement having taken place in the weather, advantage was taken of it to renew the attack on the 16th. "Fifth Army attacked at 4.45 a.m. We heard at breakfast time that the attack was progressing well, except on the right flank where the country is very wooded and much broken up by our heavy shell fire, so that progress was slow.

"At 9.45 our troops of II Corps were reported in Polygon wood, and flank had been formed along southern edge of Glencorse wood.

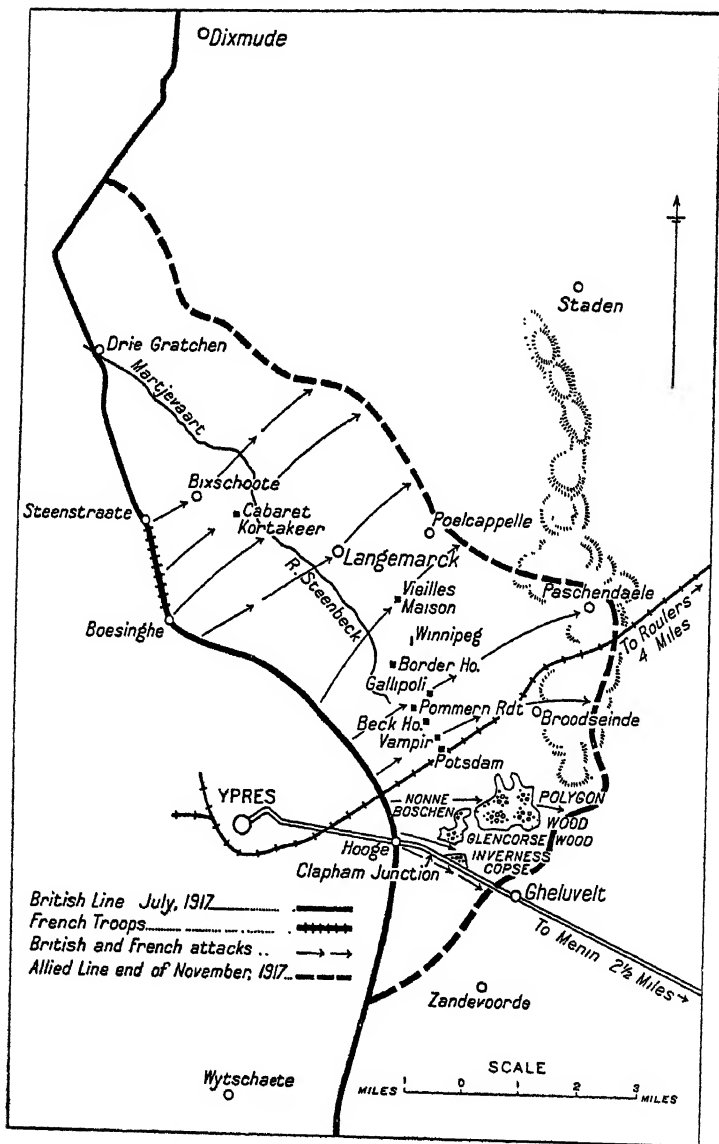
"XIX Corps and XVIII Corps had both got Green line. XIV Corps had passed beyond Langemarck.

"At 10.30 a telephone message stated that our troops had been seen coming back from Nonne Bosschen and Galli-



# PASCHENDAELE

## AUGUST - NOVEMBER, 1917



MAP 5

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poli. It is very difficult in these battles quickly to discover what the real situation is. By 4.30 it was known that the II Corps was on the line Clapham Junction and thence through Glencorse wood connecting with the right division (16th) of XIX Corps, which is on line Potsdam-Vampir-Beck House. Left division on line Pommern Redoubt-Border House. XVIII Corps on line Border House-Crossroads west of Winnipeg-Crossroads Vieilles Maisons-Rat House.

“XIV Corps are on Red line, i.e. has taken all objectives and over nine hundred prisoners.

“On the left of the latter corps, the French occupied the whole of the ground up to the Martjevaart as well as bridgehead at Drie Gratchen. Also 300 prisoners. So French have done well and are in good spirits. ‘Casualties extremely small’, they report.”

As a general result, the attack was successful along most of the front: only the right of the Fifth Army was not able to gain, on the Ypres ridge south of Hooge, all that was intended. The diary goes on:

“Sir William Robertson arrived from England at 3 p.m. I had a talk with him till 4.30 p.m. The Prime Minister sent me a friendly message by him, with an expression of confidence in me. This was, I gather, due to his having said at the recent London conference (with reference to my present operations) that ‘he thought we had put our money on the wrong horse. We ought instead to have reinforced the Italians’.

“In reply, I told Robertson to thank the Prime Minister for his message, but what I want is *tangible* support. *Men, guns, aeroplanes*. It is ridiculous to talk about supporting me ‘wholeheartedly’ when men, guns, rails, etc. are going in quantities to Egypt for the Palestine expedition; guns to the Italians, to Mesopotamia and to Russia. Robertson

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agreed, and said he was entirely opposed to any Italian venture."

The new weapon which came into prominence during this day's fighting was the small ferro-concrete nest of machine guns, which came to be described as a "pillbox", and with which General Sixte von Arnim had studded his lines of defence.

Continuous rain prevented any renewal of the battle on a wide scale during August, although some local attacks took place and were accompanied with varying success.

Although the Passchendaele-Staden ridge had not yet been reached, the question whether or no to put into execution the original plan of a naval demonstration and a landing by the Fourth Army on the coast near Ostend was anxiously discussed by Haig, Admiral Bacon and General Rawlinson.

"The Admiral was anxious to carry out the landing in the first week in September. I told him that the advance of our Fifth Army had not been sufficient to justify my running the risks of attempting to land a force so far out of reach of adequate support for *military* reasons alone. Could *he* say that the *naval* situation demanded it? If so, then the risks *must* be run."

The Admiral, however, was not prepared to say that the naval situation was as serious as it had appeared in June, and after further discussion Haig decided, without abandoning the idea, to postpone indefinitely the date of the landing.

On the 22nd an attack was delivered by the II Corps, on the right of the Fifth Army, along the Menin road, where small progress was made at the cost of heavy casualties. The fighting continued for the two following days, every inch of the ground was fiercely disputed, and when no conclusive result had been obtained Haig determined that the situation on that road of tragic memories demanded a more care-

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fully planned treatment, for advance here was essential to any further success.

On August 24th "I directed the C.G.S. to consider, in view of the apparent difficulty of holding Inverness copse, and of the decisive nature of the fight for the ridge, whether it would not be necessary to enlarge the front of our attack so as to include Zandevoorde on our right. This will cause the enemy to disperse his artillery fire, and may also mislead him as to the objectives of our attack.

"After dinner I discussed the situation with Kiggell and Davidson. The former was opposed to attacking Zandevoorde because it would use up more divisions and the time for preparation would come to three or four weeks, i.e. to the end of September.

"I arranged to see Generals Plumer and Gough on the situation to-morrow."

The next day "I got back to Blendecques at 1 o'clock and met General Plumer. I had a talk with him on the situation on the ridge on which is Inverness copse. He did not think it was necessary to attack Zandevoorde in order to capture Polygon wood and the ridge beyond. I pointed out that unless Zandevoorde were attacked, the enemy could enfilade, from the present positions of his batteries in the hollow east of Zandevoorde, not only the Inverness copse spur, but also the Broodseinde ridge. I accordingly told him that as soon as the II Corps (Jacob) had terminated the operation for the capture of Nonne Bosschen (which the 23rd Division was just starting) the left of the Second Army would be extended to the Ypres-Roulers railway, and he would have as his objectives the capture of the Broodseinde-Polygon wood ridge, in order to cover the right of the Fifth Army. He is at once to make his arrangements to capture Zandevoorde, but if he found that he could capture the Gheluvelt spur without doing so, then he need not do it.



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“At 3 p.m. I saw General Gough. He explained his plan, and stated that in his view Zandevoorde ought to be attacked. I then told him what Plumer’s orders were, and asked him to consider what day would be most suitable for handing over the II Corps front to the Second Army.”

The last days of August were worthy of the beginning of that fearful month. High winds, heavy rain and winter cold depressed the spirits and increased the discomfort of the troops.

Haig devoted some of these days to the inspection of the Dominion forces, which had steadily increased in numbers and efficiency since the first contingents landed in France—on August 27th.

“At Les Quatre Vents I was met by General Burstall, commanding the 2nd Canadian Division, and George Black with the horses. A ride of about ten minutes across country brought us to where the 4th Canadian Brigade (Rennie) was drawn up. General Currie, commanding Canadian Corps, met me here. He has sprung a tendon in his leg (calf) playing badminton, and is very lame. Currie is a very big, tall, heavy man. He must have been in great pain, but he stuck it all day. Big legs are necessary to support such a large frame as General Currie has.

“After inspecting the brigade, the troops marched past me, re-formed and gave three cheers. They asked me if I had any objection to the latter: ‘they wished to do it, and cheering does us good’, so of course I agreed, though it would have seemed out of place in our old Regular Army to cheer except on the King’s Birthday.

“I rode on and inspected the 5th (Ross) and the 6th (Ketchen) Brigade—and also shook hands with the G.O.C. of the 3rd Canadian Division (Lipsett) and of the 4th Division (Watson) and their staff. The troops of the latter were in the line.

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"It was now past noon, and I then rode about four miles across country to the vicinity of Bethonsart, where General Tuxford (in temporary command of 1st Canadian Division) met me.

"The 1st Canadian Division (Griesbach) and 2nd (Loomis) were drawn up close to the village. Rain fell heavily during my inspection, but I saw each brigade march past by fours, which took a considerable time, so that it was after 1.30 p.m. before I had finished. I rode into the village and had lunch from our lunch box in a room in a farm, and then motored to Lozinham, where at 2.45 p.m. I inspected the 3rd Canadian Brigade. Tuxford's own brigade. There are three kilted battalions in this brigade. All fine big men. The experience and training of the past year have done wonders for the Canadians. Their morale is now very high, and though they have been opposed by the flower of the German army (Guards, etc.) they feel that they can beat the Germans every time.

"I was greatly pleased with the smart turn out, and the earnest determined look of all ranks. The officers and all ranks were, I think, honestly glad to see me, because several C.O.'s thanked me for my visit, and said how much trouble their men had taken to turn out smart for my inspection.

"It was a terrible afternoon of rain. I got back to advanced G.H.Q. about 4.30 p.m.

"These two Canadian divisions have 'knocked out' 7 German divisions, viz.: the 7th, 220th, 4th Guard, 1st Guard Reserve (these are four of the very best divisions in the German Army), 11th Reserve, 36th Reserve (these are not so good) and 8th Division (also very good). This fact in itself is an indication of the enemy's loss of morale. That these two Canadian divisions are now in such a fine state is due to having ample reserves to replace casualties, i.e. the result of a sound organisation."

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Two days later it was the turn of the Australians. "At 10.30 a.m. I inspected the 2nd Australian Division under Major-General Smythe. The division was drawn up in column of brigades about half a mile west of Campagne (on the St. Omer-Aire road). After my inspection, one battalion per brigade marched past by platoons. The men looked in fine health and marched past very well. The sight of the whole division on parade was a splendid spectacle. Brigades were commanded by Smith, Paton and Wisdom.

"I then rode on about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  to 4 miles towards Aire and inspected the 5th Australian Division. Major-General Hobbs, commanding, was away on leave, so Brigadier-General Tivey, the senior brigadier, took command. Hobkirk and Elliott were the two other brigadiers. After my inspection of the ranks, a battalion from each brigade marched past in column of companies; this they did splendidly; the front of each company could not have numbered less than 100 men. Lastly four battalions advanced in review order and presented arms.

"I complimented Birdwood, his G.O.C. divisions and brigades on the splendid appearance of the troops to-day. The Australians have never looked better since they came to France than they did this morning. I was greatly pleased with their bearing and evident desire of each one to do his very best to show up well at my inspection. These divisions have been out of the line for three months and have benefited from the training which they have undergone. The rain kept off very well, and I got back to Blendecques by motor in time for lunch."

In the early days of September Haig received a telegram from Robertson asking him to go to London in connection with a demand recently received from Foch, who was now Chief of the Staff in Paris, for a hundred heavy guns to be transferred to Italy from the French contingent then

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serving with the British Army. In the note which Foch drew up formulating this demand he suggested that the British might be able to continue the battle in Flanders without the assistance of these guns, "a battle", he wrote, "which is indispensable in order to tie down the enemy to prevent the sending over of German reinforcements to Italy". In view of the statement that has been made that Foch was opposed to the Flanders offensive, it is worth noting that he considered it "indispensable" to the right conduct of the war.

Haig crossed to England on September 3rd and together with General Davidson attended a military conference at the War Office next morning, when Robertson and Foch were present.

"Foch asked for guns to go to Italy because the *political* effect of a success there would be greater, in his opinion, than one in Flanders. He asserted that the French guns would be doing nothing for a month in Flanders. This, of course, I told him, was not the case. French guns on Anthoine's front have a wide sector, and are employed covering our left and supporting the Belgians at the present moment by counter-battering hostile guns. He, however, still continued to argue on the same lines. I returned for lunch to Eastcott and at 3 p.m. I attended the War Cabinet at 10 Downing Street. . . . I explained that at the present time the decisive point was in Flanders and it was most unsound policy to withdraw a single gun from this sector. I produced maps showing where the French guns were situated and how they were employed.

"The Prime Minister was very anxious that some guns should be sent. Bonar Law was, as usual, very weak. Carson and General Smuts were opposed to any guns going. Lord R. Cecil for Foreign Office 'dissociated' himself from everything the Prime Minister proposed.

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“Finally it was agreed that the matter should be placed in my hands. After explaining that it was the wish of the Cabinet that the guns should be sent if I could possibly spare them, Lloyd George spoke to me alone and said that it was very desirable to help the Italians at this juncture, because the French were trying to supplant us in their affections. We must not give the French the power of saying that *they wanted* to send 100 guns, but the British would not let them go. I said that I would review the whole gun situation on the battle front and if we could possibly liberate 50 guns it would be done. He said he was very grateful.

“At 4 p.m. General Foch arrived, and went through the same performance as this morning, viz. argued that the guns were really doing nothing on our front in Flanders. The proposal of holding a conference with me and Pétain was discussed, and after I had seen Foch we agreed to meet at Amiens on Friday at 12 noon; meantime I am to wire to France and direct Kiggell to discuss the gun situation with Birch and Anthoine with a view to liberating 50 French guns for Italy.”

Lord Derby accompanied Haig on his return to France two days later and together they attended a military conference at Amiens on September 7th. Meanwhile Haig had decided to meet the French demand on condition that Pétain would undertake to replace the guns in time for the attack. Pétain consented to do this and the conference therefore passed off very successfully.

Commenting on it afterwards, Haig wrote:

“Foch seemed on arrival at Amiens to have all his hackles up, but my few friendly words quickly calmed him, and we were all on the best of terms. His experiences in London should have done him good. He had gone there behind the back of Pétain and myself to get the British War

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Cabinet to sanction 100 French guns being withdrawn from *my* command. The War Cabinet then handed the question to me to arrange with Pétain. This we have done satisfactorily for all. I found Pétain to-day straightforward and clear in his views, and most businesslike. And, as he said himself to-day, 'the Marshal and I never argue and haggle over such matters'."

Haig had gone out of his way in this matter to meet the wishes of the Prime Minister, although there was division of opinion in the War Cabinet. Lloyd George sent him a telegram—"My colleagues and I are much gratified at the manner in which you have met them in regard to Italy. Please accept our best thanks for the promptitude with which you have carried out our wishes in a matter which was of great importance to the interallied policy."

Haig entertained several politicians at headquarters during the month. Winston Churchill, who had recently become Minister of Munitions, arrived there on the 13th. He had one or two lengthy conversations with the Chief of Staff and the Artillery Adviser with regard both to department matters and to larger issues. Haig's comment was, "I have no doubt that Winston means to do his utmost to provide the Army with all it requires." Haig found Sir Edward Carson, who arrived on the day that Mr. Churchill left, "quite a rest to deal with after Winston. He is convinced that the military experts must be given full power, not only to advise but to carry out their plans. He is all opposed to the meddling now practised by the Prime Minister and other politicians."

F. E. Smith came to luncheon one day and was "most communicative and very friendly. He stated privately to me after lunch that he, Lloyd George and Winston Churchill dine regularly together once a week, and that although he is not in the War Cabinet he is in a position to

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influence the Prime Minister very considerably. He assured me that he (Smith) is all out to help us soldiers on the western front."

J. H. Thomas he found "a broad-minded patriot, most anxious to help and fully alive to what the gentry of England have done in the war"; and Austen Chamberlain was "a most charming and capable fellow", while Robert Cecil was "an honest, level-headed fellow". But his highest praise was reserved for Mr. Asquith, who stayed for two nights with him in the middle of the month. "I felt", he wrote, "that the old gentleman was head and shoulders above any other politician who had visited my headquarters in brains and all-round knowledge. It was quite a pleasure to have the old man in the house—so amusing and kindly in his ways."

Meanwhile preparations were going forward for the mounting of a new battle, for the enemy, profiting by the respite, had brought up fresh troops, so that Haig judged it necessary to prepare a fresh combined offensive, its front extended nearly another two miles on the right. This time the main attack was to be delivered by Plumer's Second Army, which had already taken over the right sector of the Fifth Army, where the I Anzac Corps had relieved the II Corps. On 17th September Haig visited the headquarters of each of the corps composing that army and attended a conference at which corps and divisional commanders together with all the senior officers principally concerned were present. He "went very carefully into the preparations made by each division for the attack as well as the corps arrangements for counter-battery work, barrages, etc." He had previously drawn up a formidable list of questions to be addressed to each corps commander.

"In every case I found the officers full of confidence as to the result of the forthcoming attack. Every detail had been

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gone into most thoroughly, and their troops most carefully trained.

“Our artillery aeroplanes had never been interfered with seriously by the enemy and the result of the counter-battery work was considered by all to be quite satisfactory.

“Altogether I felt it most exhilarating to go round such a very knowledgeable and confident body of leaders.”

On the following day he paid a similar visit to the corps headquarters of the Fifth Army, who were equally taking part in the battle.

“I called first at hqrs. V Corps near Poperinghe and saw General Fanshawe (commanding V Corps) and amongst others—Br.-General Benson (his C.R.A.); Major-General Lukin (9th Division); Jeudwine (55th Division); Deverell (3rd Division); Romer (59th Division). The two first are commanding the two divisions which are attacking. They explained their plan in detail. These seemed thorough and sound. General Benson’s arrangements did not seem so satisfactory. He withdrew guns from counter-battery work at zero to thicken his barrage. I pointed out that the enemy’s guns on his corps front might then freely turn against the Anzacs on his right: it was essential, in my opinion, that every known hostile battery should be engaged at zero; *subsequently* guns might be withdrawn if the situation permitted. His map of the enemy’s gun positions was not up to date. I directed General Birch (our Artillery Adviser) who was with me to go into the details of the artillery plan with Fifth Army after I had finished my tour of inspection to-day.

“All were very confident of success. But Benson and others stated that the enemy’s aeroplanes had been causing more trouble than ever before, and some batteries had been bombed by them.

“I next visited General Maxse, commanding XVIII



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Corps—General Harper (commanding 51st Division): Fanshawe (commanding 58th Division) explained their plans of attack. All very thorough and satisfactory. Br.-General Fasson, the C.R.A., was as usual very clear in his explanations. Though doubled up with rheumatics, he has a grand spirit and does his work as thoroughly as anyone, and without a grumble about the pain which he must constantly be suffering.

“It was now past 1 o’clock, so we lunched in the grounds of Château Lovie. Afterwards I called on Gough and told him what I had found in the V Corps artillery arrangements. Otherwise, I thought everything quite satisfactory. I am inclined to think that the Fifth Army staff work is not so satisfactory as last year.

“About 2.30 I called at hqrs. XIV Corps and saw Lord Cavan and Major-General Douglas Smith, commanding 20th Division—and Br.-General Wardrop, C.R.A., etc. All full of confidence. Cavan is quite pleased with the French support on his left.

“On my way back I left General Birch at Fifth Army hqrs. to go into the V Corps artillery plan, and then called at Second Army hdqrs. at Cassel. General Plumer was in great spirits. I told him that I had only small suggestions of detail to offer as a result of my visit to his corps and divisions yesterday. Everything was quite satisfactory. I could only wish him great success and good luck.

“The old man was full of good spirits and most confident.”

There had been a slight improvement in the weather during the first fortnight of September and the 20th had been decided upon as the date of the attack. Unfortunately on the night before rain again fell very heavily, so that Gough proposed a postponement of operations. Plumer, however, having consulted his corps and divisional com-

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manders, determined to adhere to the plan and the attack was launched at 5.40 a.m. The result, despite the condition of the ground which inflicted great hardship on the troops, was eminently successful. John Buchan, in his *History of the War*, writes, "This day's battle cracked the kernel of the German defence in the Salient. It showed a limited advance, and the total of 3,000 prisoners had been often exceeded in a day's fighting; but every inch of the ground won was vital. . . . The battle of September 20th was a proof of what heights of endurance the British soldier may attain to. It was an example, too, of how thought and patience may achieve success in spite of every disadvantage of weather, terrain and enemy strength."

Although the historian is correct in stating that this advance was limited, it should be understood that according to the tactics now adopted it was not intended to advance more than 1,500 yards, and on this occasion all objectives were gained.

Haig, as usual on the days of attack, spent the morning receiving information and estimating its importance, and in the afternoon he visited the commanders of the two armies and fixed September 26th as the date of the next attack.

That evening the Germans delivered no less than eleven counter-attacks in the hope of dislodging the British from the positions they had gained in the morning. Only one of them met with any success and that was temporary. The further attack took place as planned on September 26th and was also completely successful. Again an advance of 1,500 yards was made and practically all objectives were gained in what came to be known as the Battle of Polygon Wood.

On the eve of the battle the Prime Minister and Sir William Robertson arrived at headquarters. At dinner the Prime Minister seemed "in the best of spirits and most

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friendly. Very much down upon the Italians;<sup>1</sup> there is now no intention of sending a British force there!"

But there were plenty of other schemes on hand. Only the day before Robertson had written to Haig:

"The Prime Minister has been away during the last fortnight, and his mind has consequently been very active. I have recently had to knock out a scheme for operations in the Aden hinterland involving the employment of not less than a division. I have also had to destroy one for landing *ten* divisions at Alexandretta, all of which would have had to come from you. Further, I have had to fight against sending up more divisions to Mesopotamia. Generally, all round, I have been quite successful, although the expenditure of energy which ought otherwise to be employed has been a little greater than usual."

The next morning, "At 9.30 a.m. I had a meeting in my room with the Prime Minister, General Robertson and Colonel Hankey, who made notes. I was asked to submit my views as to the role of the British forces in the event of the Russians dropping out of the war—and the Italians and French doing (as they are doing now) very little. I am to give a considered opinion. My opinion without having gone into details is that we should go on striking as hard as possible with the object of clearing the Belgian coast. We should be prepared to make and win the campaign.

"As regards sending a division to Egypt, I stated that the sound policy for the Allies is to occupy a defensive attitude *everywhere* except on the western front which has been accepted as the decisive front by the British Government.

"I could arrange to give personnel to form machine-gun companies to reinforce Baghdad. On no account, however,

<sup>1</sup>The reason for Lloyd George's irritation was that General Cadorna, having extracted 100 guns from the French and British, had telegraphed to say that he had abandoned the offensive for which they were intended. See *Official History*, 1918, vol. i, page 8.

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should any division be taken from the British front here for a defensive front.

"I stated that I intended to see Pétain as soon as possible and urge on him the importance of attacking without delay. I only heard last night that the French have delayed their attack which was to have taken place yesterday or to-day at latest.

"Lloyd George mentioned that Painlevé had referred to their desire that the British should take over more line. I said that we must set our face against doing any such thing. In my view, the plan for next year should be settled first and the necessary troops for *attack* be selected and specially trained for the purpose. I gathered from what the P.M. said that some members of the Government think that no offensive will be possible by the Allies on the western front next year.

"The Prime Minister visited Poperinghe this afternoon, and saw some German prisoners recently arrived in the cages. He seems to have been much encouraged by what he saw. A shell fell near his car (100 yards off) as he was passing along the 'Switch road' near Poperinghe. This also pleased him."

Mr. Lloyd George has since expressed surprise at the spirit of quiet confidence which he found prevailing at G.H.Q. during this visit. However bad the position had been, a spirit of confidence would presumably have been preferable to one of nervous anxiety or panic. But indeed there was little cause for dejection. That war is a ghastly business and that a war waged against so powerful and valiant an enemy as Germany can only be won at the price of fearful sacrifice, hideous suffering and wholesale slaughter, were facts that had been present to the minds of all, and often before the eyes of many of the officers at G.H.Q. during the last three years. They were not ignorant of the conditions in which men were fighting. Six young officers

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of brigade-major rank were deputed to visit regularly the front line and to report to the General Staff on the state of the ground as well as on other matters. In addition, the General Officer Commanding Royal Artillery, the Engineer-in-Chief and the Quarter-Master-General had each a liaison officer whose duty it was to keep his chief informed of the effect of the weather upon the operations of their various branches. They in turn informed the Commander-in-Chief. The legend of the staff officer who wept when he saw the mud at Passchendaele is either apocryphal or does little credit to the nerves of the man who could not bear to see conditions concerning which he had already received full information.

So much has been written of the mud at Passchendaele that it might almost be believed that mud had never appeared before in the history of war. But mud is an old acquaintance of the soldier and, although it has frequently hindered, it has seldom frustrated the successful conduct of military operations. Mud did not stop the advance of Napoleon in Poland nor that of Grant in Virginia. It was present in varying quantities throughout the war on the western front, but it did not stop Rawlinson on the Somme, nor Allenby at Arras, nor even Plumer at Messines, when, in fact, it was worse than it afterwards proved at Passchendaele.

It was not until October, that is to say in the final stages of the battle, that it presented a serious problem. "The low-lying, clayey soil, torn by shells and sodden by rain, turned to a succession of vast muddy pools. The valleys of the choked and overflowing streams were speedily transformed into long stretches of bog, impassable except by a few well-defined tracks, which became marks for the enemy's artillery. To leave these tracks was to risk death by drowning, and in the course of the subsequent fighting on several



HAIG IN THE FIELD  
*Imperial War Museum photograph*  
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occasions both men and pack animals were lost in this way.”<sup>1</sup> These were not the words of an imaginative war correspondent but the words which Haig himself used in his official despatch describing the battle, and they prove that he was well acquainted with the conditions in which it was fought. The suggestion that he should have visited the front line in person could only be made by writers totally ignorant of modern warfare. It is easy to sneer at generals for maintaining their courage when they are far removed from the post of danger, although such sneers come ill from civilians who have never been in danger at all. But for a man who is naturally brave, and most soldiers are, a very high kind of courage is required to send others to their death while remaining in safety. And for a highly placed officer to endanger his life unnecessarily is a grave dereliction of duty.

Not only was it incumbent upon those who were responsible for the conduct of the battle to maintain a confident bearing, but also, at the time of the Prime Minister's visit, they had considerable cause for satisfaction. The operations on September 20th and 26th had proved remarkably successful, and there was no reason to suppose that the progress which had been made would not shortly be continued.

If there had existed any doubt in Haig's own mind with regard to the successes that were being achieved it might have been removed by the chorus of approval and the stream of congratulations that reached him not only from London, but from all parts of the Empire. The King telegraphed on the 3rd October, “The continued success of my gallant troops in Flanders gives me the highest satisfaction and reflects great credit both upon your leadership and the efficiency, endurance and courage of all ranks concerned.” Queen Alexandra telegraphed on the same day, and on the following one General Pershing, the American Comman-

<sup>1</sup>See *Sir Douglas Haig's Despatches*, p. 116.



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der-in-Chief, sent a message: "Permit me to extend sincerest congratulations to you and your magnificent army upon the recent important gains in front of Ypres. They give a striking answer to weak-kneed peace propaganda." Two days later the Prime Minister of New Zealand sent a telegram in equally enthusiastic terms, and Mr. Ian Macpherson, then Under Secretary of State for War, wrote, "Everyone is proud of your success and there is a feeling of appreciative gratitude towards you and your men which should strengthen and encourage you in your days and hours of anxiety."

Of greater importance still was a letter from the Secretary of State, Lord Derby, written immediately after the Prime Minister's return to London.

"First of all", he wrote on September 28th, "very many hearty congratulations on your great successes. You cannot imagine how it has bucked up everybody here. I hope it is only the beginning of several more advances before the winter sets in. . . . Lloyd George is extremely pleased with his visit to you and very enthusiastic in praise of all that you are doing. This Italian volte-face has given him a rude shock and in that way it has done good in showing how absolutely we must rely on ourselves and not on our Allies."

On October 16th, further and less successful attacks, which will be described later, having been made in the interval, Haig was not a little surprised to receive the following telegram from the Prime Minister:

"The War Cabinet desire to congratulate you and the troops under your command upon the achievements of the British armies in Flanders in the great battle which has been raging since 31st July. Starting from positions in which every advantage rested with the enemy and hampered and delayed from time to time by most unfavourable weather, you and your men have nevertheless continuously

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driven the enemy back with such skill, courage and pertinacity, as have commanded the grateful admiration of the peoples of the British Empire and filled the enemy with alarm. I am personally glad to be the means of transmitting this message to you and to your gallant troops, and desire to take this opportunity of renewing my assurance of confidence in your leadership and in the devotion of those whom you command."

Haig copied the message into his diary, and added the comment, "This is the first message of congratulation on any operations from the War Cabinet which has reached me since the war began."

The difficulty that Haig and Lloyd George experienced in working harmoniously together at this period was due to a profound divergence of faith. The fact that they differed temperamentally was of slight importance. Lloyd George was possessed of charms which, when exercised, could easily overcome Haig's initial distrust, and in any case Haig was more interested in principles than in personalities. But the fact was that Lloyd George no longer believed that the German Army could be beaten. His opinion was shared by many. It had already been voiced by Lord Lansdowne. Foch was prepared to accept it as an hypothesis. Pétain was less optimistic than Foch. Even Robertson had his moments of doubt. Esher wrote to Haig in August, "L. G. and Wully<sup>1</sup> want to beat the Boche, but are not sure they *can*. I believe there is no man left but you who wishes to beat the enemy and believes that—given patience—it can be done."

Strong in that faith which others were losing, Haig steadfastly maintained his way, and it will be seen by how few that faith was shared and how solitary that way became. Until the very eve of victory, which still lay twelve

<sup>1</sup>Sir William Robertson.

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months ahead, those doubts persisted in the minds of others and made them difficult colleagues, because they genuinely distrusted the soundness of his views. These were hard days for him because he lacked both the power of exposition that might have proved his case and the eloquence that might have inspired confidence in others. He was supported by the conviction that his strategical opinion, based upon the ceaseless study of a lifetime, could not be wrong; and by the religious faith which grew ever stronger with the passage of years. On one Sunday during October the Rev. George Duncan preached from the text, ". . . He shall give his angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways." Having recorded the text in his diary, Haig added—"This morning I am somewhat anxious regarding the change of plans at home and the large demands now being made on this army for a field force to go to Italy. Certainly Duncan's sermons are most comforting and give one peace of mind in these days."

Meanwhile he was waiting anxiously for the delivery of that French attack in the south which had been promised and on which he was relying to weaken the resistance of the German army in Flanders. On September 29th, however, "Colonel de Bellaigue (head of the French mission) came to see me at 9 a.m. Most insistent that I should know that *he* had done all in his power to get the French to attack on the Aisne as soon as possible. As a matter of fact, they cannot attack till the 10th or 15th October because they will not be ready. I limited my remarks to reminding him that *Pétain had promised to 'attack on or about the 15th September'*."

"At 11 a.m. I received General Anthoine. He came to report as the result of his interview with Pétain, and the result of his enquiries in General Franchet d'Esperey's army group. The latter said he would be ready on the

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10th October. General Maistre (commanding army) put date at 14th, and General de Maud'huy (commanding corps) thought it impossible to attack till the 20th October. The cause was ignorance; they wished to have the same large number of guns as Anthoine's, but did not know the great preparations required beforehand in the way of ammunition dumps, light railway, telegraph and telephone communication. Pétain could give me two days' heavy bombardment whenever I liked. I said that any attack after my main attack would help me. It was most important to do something *now*, to prevent the enemy bringing more troops to my front. So I said that a heavy bombardment two days before my attack went in was the least I could expect. Anthoine went off to telephone to Pétain. Here is an attack which was promised for the *middle of September* not ready to go until the 15th October! I doubt if it will go in then! If the 'intention to attack' existed the attack would have been ready to time. Gemeau tells me that the morale of the French troops is now excellent: what is wrong is the 'material', i.e. telegraph lines and emplacements have yet to be made."

A week later, on October 6th, "General Pétain came to see me at 4 p.m. He said that he was heartbroken (*navré*) at the delay in putting in his attack on the Aisne. He could not override the decision of the generals on the spot, and sending the guns to Italy had further delayed things.

"He had arranged to bombard on the 6th and 7th as requested by me, and was sure that the Germans could not withdraw divisions from that front. He was also anxious to support my offensive to the fullest extent possible and had told General Anthoine that he was free to make use of his reserves, and that he would send him more troops to replace them."

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On October 2nd Haig held a conference with Generals Plumer and Gough, the two army commanders principally concerned in the battle. In view of erroneous statements that have since been made with regard to the attitude of both these generals, it is as well to quote the record which Haig kept of these affairs at the time:

"I held a conference at my house at Cassel at 11 a.m. Kiggell, Davidson and Charteris accompanied me. Generals Plumer and Gough were also present with their senior staff officers and General Nash (D.G.T.). I pointed out how favourable the situation was and how necessary it was to have all necessary means for exploiting any success gained on the 10th, should the situation admit, e.g. if the enemy counter-attacked and is defeated, then reserve brigades must follow after the enemy and take the Passchendaele ridge at once. Masked guns for this object should be placed behind the Gravenstafel ridge as soon as we have captured it. Tanks must also be arranged for. The cavalry corps to have its head on the Ypres canal ready to move up early on the 11th. General Nash said he would have three railways ready, and could move a division up by each line in 3½ hours to point of detrainment.

"Both Gough and Plumer quite acquiesced in my views and arranged wholeheartedly to give effect to them when the time came." Nor was the expression of such wholehearted acquiescence reserved for the ear of the Commander-in-Chief. When Colonel Repington visited the Second Army in October he "found Plumer heart and soul for the Flanders offensive. I asked him whether he was thinking of his present tactical objectives or whether he had in mind the strategy of next year and its possibilities. He said that he had both, and had fully considered the future possibilities."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Repington, vol. 2, p. 99.

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On October 3rd Haig was informed by a letter from Robertson that the British Government had approved in principle of the British Army in France taking over more line from the French, and that the details were to be arranged between himself and Pétain. This decision had been reached by a conference held at Boulogne on September 25th between the Prime Minister, Robertson and the French authorities, and yet neither the Prime Minister nor Robertson had mentioned the matter to Haig at their subsequent interviews. Haig regarded the decision as a "bomb-shell", and while he was accustomed to such treatment from the Prime Minister, he could not understand it on the part of Robertson.

On the morning of October 4th another limited advance was made, principally by the Second Army. Once again the attack was heralded by the heavens opening. After a few fine days the weather broke on the night of the 3rd and rain fell in torrents. This persistent ill fortune was, however, on this occasion somewhat compensated for by the fact that the British attack preceded by exactly ten minutes an attack which the Germans themselves were about to deliver. The result was that our barrage fell upon the enemy's infantry at the very moment when they were forming up for the assault, and inflicted fearful casualties upon them. That day all objectives were captured and success was complete. The Australian Official History of the War, commenting on the events of the 4th of October, says, "An overwhelming blow had been struck and both sides knew it. The objective was the most important yet attacked by the Second and Fifth Armies and they had again done almost exactly what they proposed to do. . . . This was the third blow struck at Ypres in fifteen days with complete success. It drove the Germans from one of the most important positions on the western front. Notwithstanding

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their full knowledge that it was coming, they were completely powerless to withstand it.”<sup>1</sup>

This is the unprejudiced view of a careful historian and it has the concurrence of the great majority of those who have studied the facts. There are some who think that with this success the battle should have been concluded. After two months' fighting a great deal had been accomplished and unless there was a remarkable and lasting improvement in the weather there was little hope of capturing the Channel ports before the inclement autumn turned to real winter.

It is as easy, looking back upon a campaign, to select the moment when it should have been discontinued as it is to tell a speculator that he should have sold his shares when they stood highest in the market. But who can tell when the tide of victory may not be at the flood which leads on to fortune? Fate had been cruel so far, but better luck had attended this last operation. How often in military history have great chances been missed through lack of that little extra will power to follow up victory. The Germans themselves had missed just such an opportunity at this same spot, in this same month three years before.

“Let the student”, writes the Australian Official Historian, “looking at the prospect as it appeared at noon on October 4th ask himself, ‘In view of the result of three step by step blows’ (September 20th-September 26th and October 4th) ‘what will be the result of three more in the next fortnight?’ In spite of all the critics, if the weather made these methods possible, was Haig’s strategic design beyond chance of attainment?”

From a purely technical standpoint there were strong arguments against selecting this particular moment for bringing the battle to an end. Although somewhat insecurely established on the Broodseinde ridge, if no further pro-

<sup>1</sup>*Official History of Australia in the War*, vol. iv, p. 875.

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gress had been made the Second Army would have been compelled to halt for the winter with the further, Passchendaele, ridge still dominating their position. Having sat for so long in front of Messines, they were aware of the disadvantages of such a situation and had no wish to repeat the experience.

In addition the combatants were well aware of the demoralisation of the German troops. During the Australian attack many had come out of the pillboxes to surrender. We now know that the German High Command were also aware of it. In the diary of Crown Prince Rupprecht, whose group of armies was opposing the British, and in the history written by his Chief of Staff, General von Kuhl, there are many entries which show that certain divisions could not be trusted to counter-attack, that others required a six days' rest, that reinforcements from the Russian front were upsetting discipline, and that on account of the great delay in the transport of new divisions no fresh troops were available to relieve those in the Passchendaele sector. Ludendorff, when asked to have a relieving attack made elsewhere, said he could not do so "until the British attacks began to fail in energy and in following close on each other". So orders were issued for giving ground slowly before the British attacks. Rupprecht comments on the 12th October, "Change of weather. Rain, I am glad to say, our best ally".

The long deferred attack of the French was now due to take place on October 23rd. Having waited for them so long, Haig would certainly have been blamed if he had not been willing to wait a little longer, and had decided to stop at the very moment when they were about to begin, leaving, at the same time, his own troops in an unsatisfactory tactical position.

It was decided that the attack should be continued on



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October 9th. The morning before was fine and the glass was rising, but at dusk a gale sprang up, the glass fell rapidly and when Haig called on Plumer in the evening it was raining heavily. Yet Plumer "stated that the II Anzac Corps, which is chiefly concerned in to-morrow's attack, had specially asked that there should be no postponement. Plumer was anxious lest the French should want to postpone. I told him that Cavendish (attached to General Anthoine) had reported at noon by telephone that 'the situation on French First Army front for attack on the 9th is on the whole satisfactory, though the bombardment has not been effective, but that General Anthoine is quite ready to carry out his attack as already arranged.'"

The attack accordingly took place, and some success was achieved, but as there was no improvement in the weather the conditions of fighting were very severe and the suffering of the troops was out of proportion to the advantages gained. On the 12th the attack was continued and again on the 22nd. The latter occasion was the most successful and all objectives were gained despite the fact that owing to the mud rifles became unusable and clean ones had to be sent up to the men in the front line. On the 23rd the French delivered a successful attack at Malmaison.

The last phase of the battle opened on October 26th, when comparatively little was achieved, and a conference took place two days later.

"At 12 noon I had a conference in my house at Cassel. Generals Plumer, Gough, with their staff officers were present—also with me were Kiggell, Davidson, Birch and Charteris.

"We discussed the situation on each of the army fronts and fixed the depth to be aimed at in the two next advances, and points of junction of the two armies, etc. It was agreed that the date already fixed for the next attack should hold,

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but that the date of the second attack should be settled at a conference subsequent to our attack on the 30th. Incidentally Gough stated that it was not the mud which prevented the XIV Corps' attack progressing the last day, but the enemy's defences which were very strong and had not been sufficiently bombarded."

On October 30th Passchendaele village was surrounded, and on November 6th it was finally captured. The last attack was made on November 10th, when at considerable cost the British position on the ridge was more firmly established. And so the long battle reached its unspectacular end.

There had been four phases in the military operations which are covered by the general term "the Battle of Passchendaele". The first phase was the advance from July 31st to August 2nd. Although this had been much hampered by rain, the successes obtained were, upon the whole, satisfactory and, if weather conditions had improved, would have afforded an adequate preliminary to a further immediate offensive.

The second phase was the long delay, during which advantage was occasionally taken of a fine interval, but little of value was accomplished.

The third phase consisted of the three successful advances that took place on the 20th and the 26th September and the 4th October. If the offensive had then been abandoned no atmosphere of failure would have been connected with that period of fighting, nor is it probable that the name of Passchendaele would have acquired such melancholy associations.

The last phase was the least successful and the most costly. The reasons for embarking upon it have been stated, and while it is easy in the light of after events to find that they were insufficient, it would be foolish to maintain that they

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were negligible or not such as must rightly have carried great weight in the mind of a Commander-in-Chief. Whether Haig was right or wrong in continuing the offensive after the 4th, or after the 12th October, may remain for ever a subject of controversy. It is true that the principal reasons for initiating the battle had disappeared or were disappearing: the Navy was mastering the U-boat danger, in spite of the Germans holding the Flanders coast; the morale of the French Army was improving, although it had not yet made the Malmaison attack. On the other hand, the Germans were badly shaken, more so than ever before. Ludendorff dared not yet begin to move large reinforcements from Russia. The first since the beginning of July arrived in September, five divisions came that month and four in October. More might soon come—ten came in November; ten more in December. It was a case of now or waiting until the spring—by which time thirty more German divisions had arrived. Had Haig left off at the end of September he would no doubt have been blamed, as Ludendorff was later for not continuing the March-April offensive when in sight of Amiens and Hazebrouck. While he would doubtless have been acquitted of pigheaded obstinacy, infirmity of purpose would have proved a graver charge.

All war is tragic. The true account of any battle is a tale of horror. In the past the troops that attacked at dawn could hope for a result before sundown, and almost invariably the efforts of one side or the other were crowned with victory at the end of the day. But the men who fought at Passchendaele awoke at morning with no such hope in their hearts and sank down at evening with no such reward. To them there seemed neither beginning nor end, neither shape nor sense in that long nightmare of mud and blood. In the hearts of many who remember it bitter resentment

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must burn for ever that such agony should have been permitted on the face of the earth.

But to the cold gaze of the historian this battle differs only in degree from those that had gone before and were to follow after. It was longer than most, the conditions were more unfavourable, the sufferings were greater, the results were less demonstrable. Yet all battles in this war were long, and were fought in cruel conditions inflicting fearful sufferings with slight substantial gains until the very end.

It has been shown at the beginning of this chapter why it was necessary to give battle at the end of July. It remains dispassionately to consider the results obtained. The final territorial objectives were not reached, but the tactical position of the British troops was considerably improved. If nothing else had been accomplished this alone would not have justified the heavy losses. But the objectives had not been only territorial. Nothing less than the salvation of the French Army and the protection of the British coast had been the gages of this great battle. While it was being fought Pétain had splendidly accomplished his stern task of restoring discipline; and the men who fought with Anthoine under Haig had set a noble example which their compatriots were already burning to emulate.

During these same months the power of invention and spirit of heroism, which have never failed the British Navy, had found out the ways and means of mastering their dread adversaries under the water. The dire menace of starvation was no longer present.

While these great changes in the situation were occurring the German Army and their General Staff had been hourly engaged. Owing to the continued British offensive they had been given no respite in which to heal their wounds or

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to produce new plans. The testimony of Ludendorff is impressive.<sup>1</sup>

“From July 31st”, he writes, “until well into September was a period of tremendous anxiety”—and later, “October came and with it one of the hardest months of the war. . . . Enormous masses of ammunition, such as the human mind had never imagined before the war, were hurled upon the bodies of men who passed a miserable existence scattered about in mud-filled shell holes. The horror of the shell holes of Verdun was surpassed. It was no longer life at all. It was mere unspeakable suffering. And through this world of mud the attackers dragged themselves, slowly but steadily, and in dense masses. Caught in the advanced zone by our hail of fire they often collapsed and the lonely man in the shell hole breathed again. Then the mass came on again. Rifle and machine gun jammed with mud. Man fought against man, and only too often the mass was successful. . . . And it must be admitted that certain units no longer triumphed over the demoralising effects of the defensive battle as they had done formerly.”

For himself he admits that “the impressions I continually received were very terrible. . . . I had not known what joy meant for many a long day.”

Captured letters and diaries of the enemy and German novels that have been written since the war prove how the despair which was creeping into the heart of the General was already taking possession of the rank and file. This was the second autumn that they had had to face these continually repeated attacks, which seemed to be preceded on each occasion by an increasingly terrific bombardment and to be delivered with growing ferocity and determination. Behind the attackers now loomed a whole new continent of reinforcements. Reading these letters, diaries and novels,

<sup>1</sup>*My War Memories*, Ludendorff, vol. ii, pp. 488-489.

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it is impossible to doubt that, just as the Battle of the Somme had broken the mainspring of the old German regular Army, so the autumn offensive of 1917 undermined the resisting power of the German nation.

In an Order of the Day Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria stated to the group of armies under his command:

“ 86 divisions, 22 of them twice, the mass of our reserve of artillery and other weapons and formations, have taken part in this, the greatest of all our battles.” And his Chief of Staff, General von Kuhl, in the history of the battle that he wrote subsequently, admits that the recruiting depots were drained to the last man. ‘From the 1st November’, he writes, ‘the average strength of the German battalions on the entire western front dwindled to 640 men. Except for the class of 1899, composed of 18-year-old youths, only men who had been already severely wounded and such men as could be combed out from the eastern front were available for the replacement of casualties. . . . This state of affairs influenced the conduct of the war in a decisive manner.’”

This war was a war of peoples, not of dynasties nor of religious faiths, not of statesmen nor of generals. It is in this particular respect that it differed from the wars of the past, and many writers have failed to understand it because they have not grasped this fact. Because it was a war of peoples there could be no victory until one side was beaten. A battle may be won by clever strategy, but more than strategy is needed to defeat a nation. Napoleon learnt this lesson to his bitter cost in the snows of Russia and under the sun of Spain. There is no braver people than the Germans; no race, by long tradition, more inured to war. Until they were defeated the war could not be won. They could not be defeated in the Dardanelles, nor in Macedonia, nor in the Julian Alps, but only where the flower of their

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great army was fighting, on the plains of Flanders and in the fields of France. To defeat them demanded every drop of blood that the Allies shed, every pang of suffering that they endured. It may well be that the world would have been happier if no war had been fought. But fought it was—and we believe that the failure of the Allies would have been a world disaster. Therefore the supreme consolation is ours to know that all the sacrifices which we made to bring us victory, including the sacrifice of Passchendaele, were not made in vain.

## Chapter XXI

# THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI

The year 1917, which had opened with high hopes in the hearts of the Allies, was drawing to its close in an atmosphere of despondency. Belief in the new political leaders was beginning to falter, and the restless brain of the British Prime Minister was determined to discover some method of restoring it.

At the beginning of October he asked the Commander-in-Chief to furnish him with a written statement of his opinion as to the line which future policy should follow in the event, which grew daily more probable, of Russia disappearing from the scene. The memorandum which Haig submitted on the subject was dated the 8th October.<sup>1</sup> It began by stating a fact that could not be disputed but was often forgotten. Germany and her allies relied upon one thing only for a favourable issue, namely the invincibility of the German Army. If that were to fail, hope would fail with it, and there would be nothing left to keep the enemy in the field. The first question, therefore, to answer was whether or no it was possible to shake that faith either by defeating that army or by so handling it as to bring it "manifestly to the point of breaking down". If the answer to that question was in the affirmative there could be no doubt as to which was the right policy to pursue.

<sup>1</sup>The memorandum is printed in full in the Official History of the War. *Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1918, Appendices, p. 1.*



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But even if the answer were in the negative was there any better alternative open to the Allies? He then repeated the familiar argument against the withdrawal of troops from the western front, insisting upon the greater facility enjoyed by the Central Powers in the matter of the transfer of troops from one area to another, on the danger that would be incurred by weakening our resistance in the west, and on the deplorable effect on public opinion which would be produced by a cessation of offensive operations, the discouragement it would cause in America, just preparing to take the field, and the fresh heart it would put into the German Army and civilian population.

He concluded by expressing his confidence "that the British armies in France, assisted by the French and American armies, will be quite capable of carrying through a sustained and successful offensive next year under certain conditions". The conditions which he insisted upon were proper reinforcements, both in men and munitions, and refusal to take over more of the French line. "One more indispensable condition of decisive success on the western front", he added, "is that the War Cabinet should have a firm faith in its possibility and resolve finally and unreservedly to concentrate our resources on seeking it, and to do so at once."

Referring to the East, he expressed the opinion that "the leading men in the East have a truer conception of what is at stake in this war than they are sometimes credited with. In my belief they realise that it is primarily a struggle between the Anglo-Saxon and the German races and ideals, and that the victor will be the predominant power in the Mahomedan world. They will wait to ascertain which side is likely to be victorious before committing themselves openly, and they have quite sufficient intelligence to understand that the issue will be decided in the theatre where the

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main German forces are and must be employed. If this were not so the comparative absence of excitement over the Turkish advance to the Suez Canal, our withdrawal from the Dardanelles, and our misfortunes last year in Mesopotamia would seem very difficult to account for."

He was prepared even for another year of unsuccessful warfare rather than accept an unsatisfactory peace.

"It would be better for the future of our race", he wrote, "to fail in next year's offensive than to accept the enemy's terms now when after more than three years of splendid effort we have brought the German resistance so near to breaking point.

"But I see no reason to apprehend failure. . . . In the present state of the German armies and of ours I am confident that if the course I have recommended be adopted wholeheartedly we shall gain far more than a limited success in the field next year."

The expression of these views, which were to be abundantly justified in less than twelve months, has been elegantly described in Mr. Lloyd George's *War Memoirs*<sup>1</sup> as "optimistic slosh", but Robertson thought differently. "Your memorandum", he wrote, "is splendid, and I hope greatly that you will credit me with saying the right thing in my memorandum which luckily went in before yours arrived. . . . I gather from Lord R. Cecil that perhaps you are a little disappointed with me in the way I have stood up for correct principle, but you must let me do my job in my own way. I have never yet given in on *important* matters and never shall. In any case whatever happens you and I must stand solidly together. I know we are both trying to do so."

The Prime Minister, as has already been indicated, was not pleased to find his two principal military advisers in

<sup>1</sup>p. 2360.

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complete agreement. Yet if they were to remain his advisers he could not totally ignore their advice. He therefore had recourse to a remarkable expedient. He caused the whole military situation to be laid before two other distinguished generals, then occupying positions at home, and asked them to give their opinion upon the conduct and the views of his Commander-in-Chief and his Chief of the Imperial General Staff. And the officers whom he selected for this duty were Lord French and Sir Henry Wilson.

Never before, perhaps, has a Commander-in-Chief, who has been superseded on account of failure, been invited by his Government to criticise his successor. If it had been proposed at the same time that the actions of the Cabinet during the last twelve months should be enquired into and reported upon by a committee consisting of Mr. Asquith and Mr. McKenna, it is doubtful whether the Prime Minister would have welcomed the suggestion. Yet the analogy is exact.

Robertson immediately sent an emissary to consult Haig as to whether he should resign. He himself felt disposed to do so, but Haig's reply was that he should remain at his post until his advice had been rejected. Haig did not approve of officers resigning in war time. His theory was very simple. So long as the Government required a man's services he should render them to the best of his ability. It was for the Government to say when they were no longer required. To this theory, under great provocation, he steadfastly adhered.

It has been seen that a reconciliation had taken place between Haig and French, but the temptation to castigate the man who had been preferred above him was too much for human nature; and French was very human. Five-sixths of the report which he produced was devoted to adverse criticism of Haig and Robertson. The remainder was a

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feebly expressed opinion in favour of remaining on the defensive in France, but he would not countenance the despatch of troops to one of the other theatres of war, the scheme upon which the Prime Minister had set his heart.

It has been seen that while Henry Wilson was with Nivelle relations between him and Haig had been satisfactory. After Nivelle's fall Pétain had requested that Wilson should be withdrawn and, as he had previously failed to make a success of commanding a corps, Haig was unable to find him employment in France. "Find me something to do soon", he had begged Haig with disarming sincerity, "or I shall get into mischief." He now held the Eastern Command in England and was busily ingratiating himself with the Prime Minister, who appreciated his vivid conversation and lively humour.

Wilson knew as well as French did what it was that Lloyd George wished them to recommend, and it is to the credit of both that they refused to recommend it. French said that it was now too late to adopt the policy of "knocking away the props". Wilson, on the other hand, said it was too early. The only point on which they could concur, with the knowledge that it would be well received by the Prime Minister, was the setting up of some interallied body to take over supreme control of the war. With this recommendation, therefore, Lloyd George was compelled for the time being to content himself, and he lost no time in putting it into effect.

The Government's decision in favour of taking over a larger proportion of the line caused Haig much trouble and anxiety during the month of October and throughout the winter. On the 18th he had a meeting with Pétain at Amiens, where the matter was discussed.

"General Pétain stated that he had been ordered by his War Committee to see me regarding taking over a por-

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tion of the French front. He told me that M. Painlevé and General Foch had recently visited London, where they had discussed the question with Lloyd George. General Wilson had also taken part in the discussion and had examined reports on the state of the French Army, with the result that 'he recommended that the British should take over some of the French line'."

"Pétain's main arguments were that since Russia might go out of the war entirely, we ought to make our defensive arrangements accordingly. He considered the Germans might bring 45 extra divisions to this front. He had no reserves. His losses were 40,000 a month—the French divisions were being reduced in number to 100, each to consist of only 6,000 infantry.

"He asked me to relieve his Sixth Army, i.e. to extend my right to a point south-west of St. Gobain—6 divisions front. The date of relief to be settled by me. He was anxious that I should agree to the principle of taking over more line.

"General Pétain's arguments seemed to me to be quite unsound. There were two main points. *First*, the possibility of the enemy bringing 45 extra divisions to this front; *second*, how to counter any increase of strength here. As regards the first, we had worked out 32 as the maximum number of divisions, but German divisions are all now of poor quality and not fit to take the offensive. Secondly, the best way to oppose the enemy's increase of strength on this front is to take the offensive. Moreover, instead of employing some of our divisions to take over line from the French, the most effective help would be for us to use them in an attack. Thus they would probably knock out 12 enemy divisions as against only holding an equal number on a defensive front. However, although I did not accept the principle of taking over more line, I said I would do my best to meet his wishes and would transfer the

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divisions now in the coast sector with their reserves, totaling four divisions, to carry out the relief. If the French Government desire the whole Sixth Army to be relieved, and the British Government concur, it is impossible for me to take over the extra line, and also retain sufficient men to carry on an effective offensive next spring."

In the letter which Haig subsequently addressed to Pétain he reiterated his opinion that to increase his share of the line as suggested would mean the abandonment of the offensive both in that autumn and also in the following spring. He was therefore reluctantly unable to increase the offer which he had made to take over a four division front. He wrote at the same time a dispatch to the C.I.G.S. stating the attitude he had adopted and asking for Government approval. The Government took the view that a decision on this matter must depend upon the military plans for the coming year which were then under consideration, and that meanwhile no action should be taken.

While these considerations were occupying the minds of Ministers in London, Germany struck a devastating blow on the Italian front. We know from Ludendorff's memoirs that if it had not been for the Passchendaele offensive the blow would have been yet heavier, for at least two divisions which were destined for Italy were diverted to Flanders. Nevertheless the effect of the Italian retreat at Caporetto was sufficiently serious and both the French and British Governments decided that substantial reinforcements must be transferred to the Italian front without delay. Haig was compelled to part with first two divisions, then two more, and finally with a fifth, and also with General Plumer who took command of them. This was a severe strain on the Expeditionary Force, and Haig believed it to be an error. In his opinion far more practical help could be given to Italy by attacking on the western front than by sending

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reinforcements. As will be seen, his next attack in France, which he already had in contemplation, might have proved far more effective if he had had in reserve, to follow it up, those divisions which had been sent to Italy.

On November 4th he met Lloyd George in Paris. "The Prime Minister first made a few remarks regarding the necessity for forming an Interallied Supreme War Council and Staff, and asked my views. I told him that the proposal had been considered for three years, and each time had been rejected as unworkable. I gave several reasons why it could not work, and that it would add to our difficulties having such a body. The Prime Minister then said that the two Governments had desired to form it—so I said that there was no need to say any more then. The Supreme War Staff is to consist of the Government with a general: in the case of France, Foch; in the case of Britain it is to be Henry Wilson.

"We then discussed the Italian situation. I urged strongly that no more troops be sent from my command in France. We could give more effective help by attacking here. L.G. said he would not decide to send more troops until he had seen what the situation is in Italy.

"Incidentally he complained about attacks being made on him in the press, which he said were 'evidently inspired by the military'. He intended to make a speech and tell the public what courses he had proposed, and how, if he had had his way, the military situation would have been much better to-day but that the military advisers had prevented him from carrying out his intentions. He took special exception to articles in the *Morning Post*, *Spectator*, *Nation*, *Globe*—and he said one editor had come back from my headquarters and said that I had complained that he (L.G.) had interfered with my tactics. I at once said, 'What is his name, because it is not true.' He said, 'Spender of the

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*Westminster Gazette.*' I said, 'I will write to him.' But L.G. at once said, 'Oh, please do not do that.'

"I thought L.G. is like our German enemy, who, whenever he proposes to do something frightful, first of all complains that the British or French have committed the enormity which he is meditating. L.G. is feeling that his position as Prime Minister is shaky and means to try to vindicate his conduct of the war in the eyes of the public and try to put the people against the soldiers. In fact, to pose as the saviour of his country, who has been hampered by bad advice given by the General Staff.

"One important point to bear in mind is that he has never taken the soldier's advice, namely, to *concentrate all our resources* on the western front.

"I gave Lloyd George a good talking to on several of the questions he raised, and I felt I got the best of the arguments. He seemed quite rattled on the subject of Italy.

"About 12 o'clock he asked me to go for a walk and I went with him up the Champs Elysées to the Arc de Triomphe. Quite a pleasant little man when one has him alone, but I should think most unreliable. When in Paris I saw no French minister.

"General Pershing came to lunch and I had a long talk with him afterwards. He is a fine type of man, honest, and apparently determined to do what he believes to be right. He spoke most openly to me and we are in full accord on the situation.

"In the afternoon I called on Marshal Joffre at 4.30 in his little house in Passy near Auteuil. A little suburban residence so different to his big mansion at Chantilly, when French Commander-in-Chief. The old man was immensely pleased at my calling on him. He said he dared not dine or lunch out as the Government were afraid of him. . . . I thought he looked older, softer and his stomach



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bigger and more wobbly than ever. He has really nothing in the nature of *work* to do.

“Lord Bertie told me that amongst the bourgeoisie and ‘the world’ of Paris, ‘père Joffre’ is the only popular figure. In my opinion the old man is past his work.”

The creation of the Interallied Supreme War Council, which from the beginning of December was to function from Versailles, was only one symptom of the British Prime Minister’s profound dissatisfaction with the conduct of the war. He always believed that political problems could be solved by the manufacture of some new form of political machinery, and he saw no reason why military problems should not admit of the same solution. To Haig, who had no doubts as to what the true solution was, the creation of a new body seemed an unnecessary and dangerous experiment. At best it could only support him in the policy to which he was determined to adhere. At worst it might interfere with him and, by withdrawing troops from the western front, render impossible the performance of his task.

On November 12th, in a speech at a public luncheon in Paris, Lloyd George thought fit to proclaim to the world his fear that the Allies were proceeding upon wrong principles, and his disappointment at the achievements of the British Army. He announced that there was an “absence of real unity in the war direction of the allied countries”, which he hoped the new Interallied Council would supply. In point of fact the unity secured between independent and equally powerful allies had been remarkable, for not a single important decision had been taken in the war without complete agreement having been first attained. Nor did the Interallied Council accomplish anything to improve relations between the Allies.

He went on to say, “We have won great victories. When

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I look at the appalling casualty lists I sometimes wish it had not been necessary to win so many." This bitter sarcasm was nothing less than an accusation against the High Command of having butchered their men unnecessarily. He went on to refer to the western front as "that impenetrable barrier" and sneered at such success as had been achieved—"When we advance a kilometre into the enemy's lines, snatch a small shattered village out of his cruel grip, capture a few hundreds of his soldiers, we shout with unfeigned joy." German agents were busy in every allied and neutral country spreading propaganda in words that were almost identical. Nor could they have invented anything more poisonous, or better calculated to break the spirit of war-weary men, who had been fighting for three years, than to tell them that their leaders were unworthy of their confidence, that their military achievements amounted to nothing, and that the front which they were still being encouraged to attack was, in fact, impregnable. We have seen how in the past Haig had been ready to forgive treatment at the hands of the Prime Minister which he had justly resented at the time. But this was no longer a personal matter. It was an attack upon the Army, and that was something which Haig could not forgive.

That the Prime Minister's opinion was not shared by his colleagues and that the unity which he was so anxious to establish between the Allies did not exist in the War Cabinet was demonstrated by Sir Edward Carson, who took the first opportunity of saying in a public speech, "I have met in the course of my work as a member of H.M. Government three great men—I say that advisedly—Field-Marshal Haig, Sir William Robertson and Sir J. Jellicoe. They have my absolute confidence, and it is really difficult to understand the different trends of thought which have appeared in the last fortnight in relation to

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these men, who morning, noon and night go through anxieties which words cannot picture, who are burdened with orders and commands which involve hundreds of thousands of lives, and who see themselves held up from time to time to the odium of their countrymen as though in some way they were betraying their country, if not by their corruption at least by their incompetence."

The Secretary of State for War, Lord Derby, joined with Sir Edward Carson in repudiating the Prime Minister's speech. "I feel that it is a speech which you will possibly think reflects on you and your men," he wrote to Haig. "I want you to allow me again to express my entire confidence in you—and I shall probably have to show that confidence in an outward and visible way. You know what I mean."

Before the Italian collapse and before the end of the Flanders campaign, Haig had already in preparation on another part of the front a fresh attack of a novel quality. This was to be entrusted to General Byng, who had succeeded Allenby in command of the Third Army. Its main distinctive feature was the lack of a preliminary artillery bombardment. This had become so inseparable a part of every offensive that few soldiers then engaged in the war could imagine the one taking place without the other. By this method and by observing the profoundest secrecy a complete surprise was effected. The following is Haig's account of the first day's fighting.

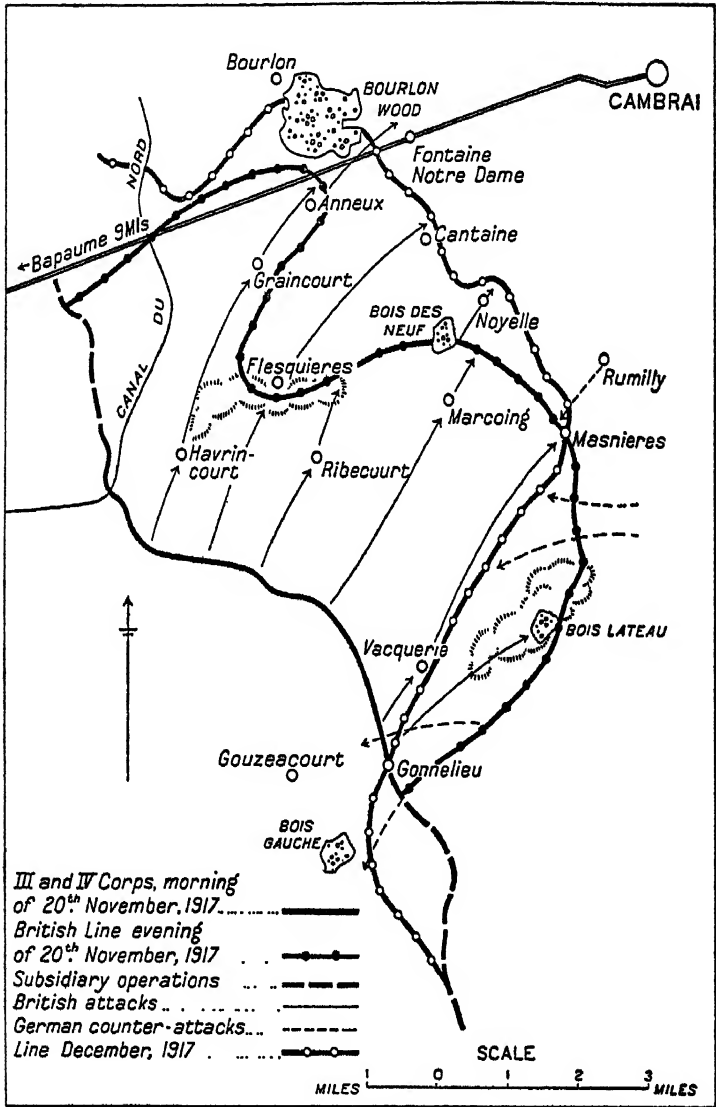
"*Tuesday, 20th November, 1917.* Glass falling slightly. Morning fine, but dull and dark. During day drizzle came on. Wind rose to a gale at night, but subsided after midnight.

"The Third Army under Byng attacked this morning at several points between St. Quentin and the river Scarpe. Operations were very successful and our casualties remarkably small.



# CAMBRAI

20<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER - 1<sup>st</sup> DECEMBER, 1917



MAP 6

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“The main attack was made on a front of about seven miles from near Gonnellieu on right to a point about two miles N.W. of Havrincourt on the left (S.W. of Cambrai). III Corps (Pulteney) on right, with divisions as follows in order from the right:—12th (Scott), 20th (D. Smith), 6th (Marden); IV Corps (Woollcombe) on left with 51st Division (Harper), 62nd (Braithwaite), and a brigade of the 36th (Nugent) on the west of the Canal du Nord.

“The attack was launched at 6.20 a.m. There was no artillery bombardment previous to this hour, but the infantry were covered by a number of tanks which cut lanes through the wire at intervals of roughly 50 yards or more. The attack was made against the famous Hindenburg lines of defence, which consist of two main systems, each most stiffly wired, with a reserve system in the rear.

“Our troops rapidly passed the first two systems of trenches and occupied the third line about Masnières and Marcoing with the canal crossings. Havrincourt, Ribecourt and La Vacquerie were taken early in the day; all were found carefully prepared for defence.

“The 12th Division captured the ridge on which is Lateau wood, and formed a defensive flank to the right.

“After the Hindenburg support line had been taken, the 29th Division (de Lisle) passed through and occupied the reserve line, including Marcoing and Masnières. A brigade of the 20th continued the defensive flank south-eastwards from Masnières on the 12th Division's left.

“The 51st Division was checked in front of Flesquières, but the 62nd pressed on and took Graincourt and Anneux before nightfall, and extended north to beyond the Bapaume-Cambrai main road.

“To withdraw the enemy's attention from the main attack and to keep him in doubt as to our intentions, two subsidiary attacks were made (a) east of Epéhy (55th

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Division—Jeurwine); (b) between Bullecourt and Fontaine les Croiselles. These had limited objectives and all were gained.”

Further progress was made on the following day. Flesquières was captured in the early morning. Noyelles, Cantaing, and Fontaine Notre Dame fell later and a counter-attack from Rumilly was beaten off. On the 22nd, however, German reinforcements began to appear and progress was seriously checked. Fontaine Notre Dame was reoccupied by the enemy and fierce fighting began for the mastery of Bourlon wood, which furnished the key to the situation.

In the course of that day, Haig met General Mullens, commanding the 1st Cavalry Division:

“I got on to Bertie Fisher’s horse (he is G.S.O.1 of the division) and rode with Mullens and Butler to a point overlooking Ribecourt from which I got a good view of Flesquières, Bois des Neuf, etc. Mullens explained all that his cavalry division had done, and said that this experience had been worth very much to them, and they were all as pleased as possible.

“On the ridge about Flesquières are a dozen or more tanks which were knocked out by artillery fire. It seems that as the tanks topped the ridge and began to descend the ridge into the village (which is on the north side of the ridge), they came under direct artillery fire. An eye-witness stated that on the appearance of the first tank all the personnel of a German battery (which was in a kind of chalk pit) fled. One officer, however, was able to collect a few men and with them worked a gun and from his concealed position knocked out tank after tank to the number of 8 or 9.<sup>1</sup> The officer was then killed. This incident shows the

<sup>1</sup>Subsequent exaggeration increased the number of tanks so knocked out to 16—and subsequent investigation reduced it to 5. (See *The Real War*, by Liddell Hart, pages 376-377.)

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importance of infantry operating with tanks and at times acting as skirmishers to clear away hostile guns and reconnoitre.

“The holding up of the 51st Division at Flesquières on the 20th had far-reaching consequences, because the cavalry were also held up and failed in consequence to get through.”

The battle continued with varying fortunes for a week. On November 30th the full force of the German counter-attack was launched and met with considerable success. If it had not been for the presence of the Guards Division the situation near Gouzeaucourt might have proved very serious. “At Templeux I saw General Pulteney, III Corps. He looked tired and had evidently passed through an anxious time. He told me about the enemy’s attack on the 30th. Apparently our patrols had gone out as usual in the early morning, found nothing unusual and had then proceeded to breakfast. There seems to have been no warning of the attack, and the enemy swept through the front held by the 55th Division (VII Corps) and parts of the 12th and 20th Divisions. The position rushed is immensely strong, but the defenders seem to have put up little or no fight at all. The enemy attacked in great masses, preceded by ‘sturm-truppen’. Some of the latter were taken prisoner at west of Gouzeaucourt. Luckily the Guards Division happened to be near the latter village and were marching back to rest (i.e. westwards) with bands playing. On hearing of the trouble the companies were at once faced about, and they advanced eastwards. The brigadier (de Crespigny) commanding 1st Brigade rode on ahead. Crowds of fugitives of all branches of the service were streaming back, some without arms and equipment. By this time the enemy was on the ridge west of Gouzeaucourt, so the Guards at once deployed and, after some heavy fighting, cleared the



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ridge and retook Gouzeaucourt, which is in the valley beyond.

“Next morning they took the Quentin ridge and Bois de Gauche, also part of Gonnellieu. The enemy, however, was able to pour in troops from the north (i.e. round their left flank) and eventually they had to give up that village, but held a line on the west of it, which they consolidated.

“This was a fine performance of the Guards Division, and if they had not been on the spot it is difficult to estimate where the enemy would have been checked. The mishap might have spread to a disaster.”

The sudden reversal of fortune on November 30th created consternation in London, where the first news of the battle had been received with excessive and premature jubilation. An official court of enquiry was set up in order to provide an explanation, with the result that blame was thrown upon the troops, especially upon junior officers and non-commissioned officers who, it was alleged, had not taken necessary precautions. Haig, characteristically, would have nothing to do with any such attempts to evade responsibility. In his dispatch recording the battle he ignored the findings of the court of enquiry and was content that any blame to be attributed should rest solely on the shoulders of the Commander-in-Chief.

During the days following the counter-attack of November 30th, the British achieved various successes in many parts of the field. The weakness of their position, however, lay in the fact that their success had created a dangerous salient from which they must either go forward or retire. If fresh troops had been available they might have gone forward from the ground already gained, consolidated their position in Bourlon wood and threatened Cambrai, but Haig had not sufficient reinforcements at his disposal

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and so was reluctantly compelled to order a withdrawal, which was carried out with complete success.

It would, however, be a mistake to think that the battle had accomplished nothing. Besides coming as a shock to the enemy, who were beginning to hope that the Flanders offensive had exhausted British powers of attack for the year, and besides inflicting heavy casualties, it had had another satisfactory effect of the very type that Haig had anticipated. "Enemy divisions destined for the Italian front were diverted to Cambrai and at a most critical period in the stand on the Piave the German concentration against Italy was suspended for at least a fortnight."<sup>1</sup> This was a signal proof of the theory, to which Haig clung so tenaciously, that it was easier to defeat the Austrians in France than to defeat the Germans in Italy.

On the 15th November he had addressed a serious warning to the Government with regard to the situation on the western front, and he had protested against the weakening of his forces by the dispatch of reinforcements to Italy.

"In view of the advanced season," he had written to Robertson, "and the existing state of the enemy's infantry on this front his attacks are, for the present, unlikely to aim at more than local and limited objectives. . . .

"The situation next year, however, may give cause for more serious anxiety if the measures outlined in your letter are carried out. . . . The increased expenditure of energy and man power on this front and in Italy during the winter will render impossible any serious offensive by the Allies on this front next spring, and under the conditions the enemy is not unlikely to seize the initiative in attack, the power of the British and French Armies to resist which will be comparatively low."

This was the first warning that Haig addressed to the

<sup>1</sup>John Buchan's *History of the War*, chapter cxlviii.

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Government with regard to the great German offensive, which he accurately foretold would come in the spring and which he already feared that the British and French Armies would find considerable difficulty in resisting.

Lenin had recently succeeded Kerensky in Russia, and it was now plain that Russia would play no further part in the war. Looking forward, therefore, into 1918, Haig had little doubt that it would be the policy of the German Government to force an issue on the western front before the full weight of the United States could make itself felt.

On the 7th December Haig presided at a conference of army commanders at Doullens. "The main topic I discussed was the organisation of our defensive lines, in view of the Russians having dropped out of the war. This will enable the Germans to employ some 30 more divisions on this front. These can be brought here at the rate of 8 to 10 per month and be used offensively if the enemy so will it.

"It is just seven months to-day since I held the last conference with army commanders at Doullens (7th May) and issued orders for the offensive against Messines. We expected at that time help from Russia, Italy and France. In reality, the British Army has had to bear the brunt of the fighting alone. I added that the commanders might well be proud of the achievements of their armies this year, and I thanked them one and all for their help and support.

". . . Reports normal—impossible to tell if enemy is going to renew his attacks near Cambrai—*we must be prepared for a strong hostile offensive in the spring*. There are many signs of this."

Henceforward Haig's main efforts were concentrated towards preparing to receive the attack which he knew must come, and all army commanders were instructed to devote

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their attention to the same subject. So far as the Government were concerned his persistent demand was for increase of man power. Even now the powers of conscription were not fully exerted. Commerce and industry were still protesting that they could not carry on if they were not allowed to retain a certain proportion of their key men; Ireland remained unconscribed and the Trade Unions did nothing to ease the situation. Great Britain was much criticised by the French for not having thrown her whole male population into the fighting line.

Unfortunately the efforts of Haig and Robertson to secure every available man for the army were not enthusiastically supported by the Prime Minister. Not only was he naturally more inclined than they were to listen with due deference to the views of the Trade Unions, but also his doubts as to the wisdom of fighting on the western front and as to the efficiency of his Commander-in-Chief had been revived and intensified by the unfortunate events of November 30th. The Prime Minister's influence over his colleagues was very great and, if he could not at present persuade them to join him in getting rid of the Commander-in-Chief, he could at least take them with him in demanding alterations in the personnel of the Commander-in-Chief's staff.

Aptitude to delegate authority and judgment in the selection of subordinates are two of the most important gifts which a man of action should possess. The charge has been brought against Haig that he was too fond of keeping control in his own hands and that he was not always wise in those whom he selected to serve him. It is true that he was himself so admirable a staff officer with so much experience of staff work that he naturally relied less upon his staff than other commanders have done. It is also true that loyalty was so much of the very fibre of his nature that he

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could not bring himself to part with anyone to whom he had once given his confidence, unless he was convinced that the individual had proved himself unworthy of it. To throw an unpopular subordinate to the wolves in order to placate public opinion would have appeared to him nothing less than a crime.

His Intelligence Officer, General Charteris, had for some time been the centre of attack from many quarters. It was alleged that his reports were misleading. He was certainly optimistic, a good fault, but he must have known the character of his chief too well to have been guilty of the methods that were imputed to him, namely, of reporting only such intelligence as he knew would be welcome. Moreover, all information that has subsequently come to light from enemy sources and elsewhere has gone to prove that Charteris's reports were extraordinarily accurate. However, he was unpopular and while he retained Haig's confidence he had lost that of others. Lord Derby wrote to Haig, not for the first time, urging his replacement. Haig's reply is a model of how a chief should behave with regard to an attack made on his subordinate.

"My dear Derby—In reply to your secret and personal letter of the 7th inst. I regret that the War Cabinet consider the views put forward by me have not been borne out by events. However that may be, I cannot agree that Charteris should be made 'whipping-boy' for the charge of undue optimism brought against myself.

"His duty is to collect, collate and place before me all evidence obtainable in regard to the enemy. He has unusually high qualifications for that duty and I am quite satisfied with the manner in which he has performed it since I have been in command. The responsibility for the judgment formed on the evidence obtained and for the views put forward to the War Cabinet rests on me and not

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on him; and if the War Cabinet are not satisfied with the views put forward by me it is I, and not Charteris, who must answer for those views.

“My judgment is not formed on the information collected by him alone, but on the views of commanders under me, who are in close daily touch with the troops and the situation on the battle fronts, and on my own experience of the German forces from the commencement of the war until now. I must presume that the dissatisfaction you mention, which I had heard of before, has been brought to a head by the local success gained by the Germans on the 30th November; but Charteris is in no way to blame for that and to connect his name with it by removing him now would be particularly unjust.

“Having heard from other sources of the existence of dissatisfaction Charteris has informed me that if I wish it he is prepared to resign as soon as I can replace him satisfactorily. I cannot accept his resignation at present for many reasons. No charge has been made against him beyond that mentioned in your letter which, as I have already said, is based entirely on matters for which, if the charge is justified at all, I am responsible and not Charteris.

“If there are other charges, those making them should put them forward for proper investigation before any decision can be formed. Over and beyond this question of personal justice to a subordinate who, in my judgment, has done excellent service, this is a bad time to choose for replacing a very important member of my staff; when all indications point to our being on the verge of a great crisis in the war.

“If the War Cabinet desire to leave the Chief Command in this theatre in my hands through the difficult months which lie before us, I am entitled to ask that their confidence may be extended to my capacity to choose my own

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staff, and I certainly do not desire at the present juncture to change the head of my Intelligence Branch.

"I trust from the above that you will recognise that I have received your letter in the same spirit as that in which you wrote it, and I have replied with equal frankness."

General Kiggell was also one who had not escaped criticism. It was said that his health was giving way under the strain of his duties. Haig thereupon caused him to be medically examined by Colonel Ryan and Sir W. Herringham, who reported that he was suffering from "nervous exhaustion due to the very exacting nature of the work he has had to perform". Haig was sceptical. "Personally", he wrote, "I think Kiggell is much better than he was two years ago when I took over from Field-Marshal French. I spoke to him. He goes on leave to-morrow and returns 28th December. We agreed together that if either he feels that he is not up to the work, or, having regard to the very serious situation now developing, viz. great increase of German divisions on western front, I think he is not fit for the work, I will ask him to go home. But at present he seems better than he has been for some time, and I am very loth to part with Kigg's help and sound advice. Butler, too, is here as Deputy C.G.S. and is at hand to take his place if anything happens, or Kigg's health goes. No one could possibly have discharged the duties of C.G.S. during the past two years of great difficulty better than Kiggell has."

Reluctantly also he was compelled at this time to part with other members of his staff. His Quartermaster-General, General Maxwell, who was sixty-five years of age, went, and was succeeded by General Travers Clarke; his Engineer-in-Chief, Sir Robert Rice, was replaced by Sir Gerald Heath, and his Director-General of Medical Services, Sir Arthur Sloggett, by Major-General C. H. Burtchaell.

Another alteration in his staff at the same period was

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caused by the replacement of Colonel de Bellaigue by General de Laguiche as head of the French mission.

Relations with the French were now entirely satisfactory. Haig visited Pétain at Compiègne on the 17th December, when they discussed the question of the British taking over a larger share of the line. "I told him", wrote Haig, "exactly how tired the British troops were and the shortage of drafts. I told him I could relieve two divisions on the 10th January and extend to the Oise by the end of January, but the latter date must be subject to settlement later according to the situation. He accepted this."

The two Commanders-in-Chief dined together that evening, and Haig's final comment on the visit was, "The relations between G.Q.G. and G.H.Q. are better than I have ever known them. . . . We parted both feeling that our meeting to-day had been most useful for the general cause."

It was not only on Haig's staff that changes were taking place. In the month of December Sir Roger Keyes succeeded Admiral Bacon in command of the Dover Patrol. Complete harmony has not in the past always prevailed between naval and military commanders when working together, but fortunately for Great Britain the perfect understanding that had existed between Haig and Bacon was succeeded by understanding and collaboration equally perfect between Haig and Keyes.

The most important change, however, which took place that autumn was the advent of Clemenceau to the premiership of France. Haig had got on well enough, as has been seen, with Painlevé, who had latterly united the offices of Prime Minister and Minister of War. Painlevé had deserved well of his country, if only for having nominated Pétain as Commander-in-Chief and Foch as Chief of the Staff, but a more masterful personality was needed for the last round of the contest. For the next twelve months the



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formidable figure of Clemenceau was an invaluable asset on the side of the Allies. It was felt in all countries that this staunch veteran, who had long ago earned himself the nickname of the Tiger, and who had personal recollections of the defeat of 1870, would never surrender so long as there was a German on French soil and a French soldier capable of bearing arms.

Nor was the will to conquer less determined in his British colleague, but it was not accompanied by the same preparedness to pay the price. Lloyd George was a more emotional man than Clemenceau, one to whom the thought of slaughter was more abhorrent and one who, being younger, was more concerned with what the future had to offer him. He was not a realist and consequently he believed in all sincerity, until the very end and long afterwards, that there must be some safe and easy way to win the war.

An amusing proof of the continuance of this belief was brought to Haig's notice in December. "The War Cabinet in London wired through our embassy in Paris to ask for General Pétain's receipt for winning battles without incurring loss. Pétain declined at first to report and treated the matter as ridiculous. Subsequently he was further pressed and so he drafted a memorandum which he sent by a staff officer to London. He gave me a copy of his memorandum. He points out clearly that his object was to organise his army and not to fight. The two attacks which he did make this summer with limited objectives were only possible because the enemy's reserves were held by the British in Flanders and his available divisions greatly weakened by fighting against the British. In fact, Pétain has no 'elixir' for winning battles without losses."

On December 26th, "Lord Milner arrived from Versailles and stayed the night. He seems to me a most honest

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and level-headed man, and he does very valuable work in steadying Lloyd George. Milner told me that he is more than ever impressed with the latter's ability and power of work. This is no doubt true, and I assured Milner that I as Commander-in-Chief in France considered it my duty to assist the Prime Minister to the fullest extent of my power and not to countenance any criticism of the Prime Minister's actions. All this I had done, and in fact had stopped criticism in the Army. On the other hand, Lloyd George had warned me at my last meeting with him in Paris (end of October last) that he was going to 'retaliate on the soldiers', as he put it, because of attacks made in the press on him, and which he thought were organised by the military. Lloyd George had asked me what my feelings would be 'if the men were told that the attacks in Flanders were useless loss of life and that all the suffering and hardship which they had endured were unnecessary'. I said such action would be most unpatriotic, yet the Lloyd George press at once commenced their attacks on me and other commanders.

"Milner admitted this, and said he had spoken to Lloyd George on the subject. I further said to Milner that if Lloyd George did not wish me to remain as Commander-in-Chief in the interests of the country, and in order to obtain success in the war, it would be much better that I should go *at once*, rather than that Lloyd George should proceed with his policy of undermining the confidence which troops now feel in their leaders, and eventually destroying the efficiency of the army as a fighting force. Morale in an army is a very delicate plant. Milner assured me that he believed all these attacks had ceased, and that he knew who had organised them. I said I did not want to know the name, but no patriot should lend himself to such cowardly work at this time of the country's crisis.

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“Milner was most pleasant, and we discussed many points most openly.

“He thinks it would be the best thing for the Allies that the Germans should attack the western front and fail. He thinks, however, that the Germans have all their attention directed on exploiting Russia to the full at the present time. We at the front, however, get a different impression, and expect to be attacked.”

Two days later he received a visit from General Pershing. “We discussed his arrangements for training the American forces and my proposals. Briefly, his scheme did not go beyond training a corps of four divisions by June. I pointed out that if peace were not made soon, the crisis of the war would be reached in April, and that he should aim at training an army staff and some corps staff as well as H.Q. of divisions in as short a time as possible. He said that if the situation became critical, he was ready to break up American divisions and employ battalions and regiments as drafts to fill up our divisions.

“My scheme aimed at developing another route from the U.S.A. to France, viz. via Southampton and Havre, and training some higher leaders, staffs and a certain number of divisions. I explained my proposals and asked for one army commander and staff; 3 ditto corps; 6 ditto divisions and also the troops of six divisions.

“After dinner I had another talk with Pershing, and we agreed to recommend that Southampton should be developed as a landing place for American troops, and that a training area be organised south of Amiens. By the time the troops begin to arrive we can decide how to employ them. He will also send certain staffs for attachment to our corps and divisional H.Q. for training.

“Pershing’s main difficulty, I gather, is that the people in America still want the American Army to support France,

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whilst American soldiers now in France want to join the British.”

An important recruit joined the ranks of Haig's enemies in the last month of the year. All through the month of November a virulent press campaign against the War Office and the Higher Command had been carried on in papers such as the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Evening Standard*, the inspiration of which originated, as nobody doubted, from Downing Street. Lord Northcliffe, who hitherto had been Haig's firmest friend, was absent in America, and as usual in his absence the newspapers under his control were reluctant to express any strong opinions. On his return he visited Haig at G.H.Q. and some of those who were present thought that he was wounded by Haig's apparent lack of interest in his voluble account of his American experiences.<sup>1</sup> When the first favourable reports of the Battle of Cambrai were received the *Times* came out with exaggerated headlines proclaiming a decisive victory and advocated the ringing of church bells throughout the country in celebration. This display of enthusiasm appeared slightly ridiculous after the events of November 30th. Whether either of these two incidents determined Lord Northcliffe's change of policy, or whether it was due to that lack of balance in his judgment which became increasingly noticeable towards the close of his life, we cannot tell, but it is the fact that all the newspapers under his control henceforward threw in their lot with Haig's bitterest enemies and attacked him as remorselessly as they had formerly attacked Kitchener.

Repington was the military correspondent of the *Times*. He had no love for Haig, nor Haig for him. In the rare interviews which he had been compelled to give him dur-

<sup>1</sup>*Field-Marshal Earl Haig*, by Brigadier-General John Charteris, page 282.

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ing the war, Haig had never sought to dissemble his personal dislike. It therefore redounds the more to Repington's lasting honour that he alone of the *Times*' staff refused to be a party to a campaign which he did not believe to be in the interest of the country. When, therefore, the editor cut passages out of his articles he protested vociferously, and when the *Times* published false and misleading information he courageously resigned his position. He was shortly afterwards employed by the *Morning Post*, and together with Gwynne, Leo Maxse and J. A. Spender formed a rather oddly assorted quartet of journalists who appointed themselves the champions of the Commander-in-Chief as against the Prime Minister.

Lord Northcliffe was promoted to a Viscountcy in the New Year's honours list.

## Chapter XXII

### CALM BEFORE STORM

At the beginning of the fifth year of the war the Allies were faced by the fact that the initiative on the western front had now passed to the enemy. Russia had ceased to play any part, and German reinforcements from the eastern frontier were pouring into France and Belgium. The questions whether, and, if so, when the Germans would attack, were occupying the minds of all who held positions of responsibility. Haig believed that if they did so it would be the gambler's last throw, as failure must mean defeat. Meanwhile his whole energies were directed towards preparing his defences.

The new year found him enjoying a short holiday with his family in the house on Kingston Hill. He needed rest, but few days passed without his having to transact some business or to attend an interview at the War Office, at Downing Street or at Buckingham Palace. The weather was very cold, Lady Haig was in delicate health and exercise was restricted to walking. Evenings were invariably passed at home, but on one occasion the whole family attended a *matinée* of the Drury Lane pantomime. "The play began at 1.30 and lasted till 5.30. We all enjoyed it greatly." This appears to have been the only theatrical performance that Haig witnessed during the war.

On January 7th "I attended a meeting of the War Cabi-

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net at 11.30 a.m. All were most friendly to me. The main points for consideration were the state of the British defences in France, and the extension of front demanded by the French.

“Lloyd George recalled the fact that the last time the British defences were discussed (spring of 1915) Lord French was Commander-in-Chief, and the First Army rear lines were found to be in excellent order, but not so those of the others! ‘If I mistake not, Sir Douglas Haig was in command of the First Army then.’

“As regards the enemy’s action, I stated that I thought that the coming four months would be the *critical period of the war*. Also that it seemed to me possible that the enemy would attack both the French and ourselves, and that he would hold reserves in hand ready to exploit wherever he might have gained a success.”

The above entry in his diary makes plain the impression that Haig had intended to convey to the War Cabinet, but according to Sir William Robertson he had succeeded in conveying quite a different one. Some members of the Cabinet, it appears, asked him whether, if he were Commander-in-Chief of the German Army, he would consider that the chances of success were sufficient to justify him in incurring the losses which an attack on the western front must produce. It was a difficult question for Haig to answer, because it was his genuine opinion that if the Germans attacked in the spring, as it appeared that they would, and if the Allies could withstand their attack, as he believed that they could, then the Germans would be defeated in the autumn. He could therefore hardly admit that if he were in command of the German Army he would pursue a policy that would lead to the defeat of that Army in the same year. A skilful dialectician would have had little difficulty in extricating himself from the dilemma, but Haig was not a

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skilful dialectician and according to Robertson<sup>1</sup> he said something to the effect that "if the Germans were wise, they would think twice before making the attempt, because if they failed their position would be critical". The politicians immediately pounced upon the statement and to Robertson's horror he saw Haig being manœuvred into the position of expressing doubts as to the probability of a German offensive.

"When coming away from the meeting," writes Robertson, "I remarked to the Field-Marshal that it would now be quite impossible for the War Office to secure for him the drafts which he required, since the War Cabinet would conclude from what he had told them that no serious attack need be apprehended, and consequently there was no urgency with respect to drafts. He denied having said anything that would bear that interpretation, and I could only reply that I was afraid the War Cabinet would think differently. Lord Derby, who was present, took the same view as myself, and we mutually hoped that the written statement which the Field-Marshal had been asked to send to the War Cabinet on the following day would help to restore matters to their true perspective."

But the paper in which he stressed the importance of bringing and keeping his divisions up to strength was of no avail. When it came before the War Cabinet the Prime Minister tossed it contemptuously aside with the remark that it was inconsistent with what the Field-Marshal had said verbally. Haig had, in effect, been tricked into giving the opinion which the Cabinet wanted to hear and even on such a vital matter they would not allow him to correct a false impression, nor would they take into account the written expression of his considered opinion. But in justice

<sup>1</sup>*Soldiers and Statesmen*, by F.-M. Sir William Robertson, vol. i, p. 320.



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to Haig it should be recorded that in this written statement he set it down that the crucial period for the Allies was about to arrive, that the Germans would make a determined effort to force a decision on the western front, that the proposals hitherto put forward by the Government for reinforcing that front in man power were quite inadequate to meet such a situation and that therefore, if the situation arose, there would be cause for anxiety. He concluded, however, by saying that if the Allies weathered the dangerous period, which he had no doubt of their being able to do, given sufficient reinforcements, victory might come in the autumn. "With the successful repulse of the enemy's attacks, with full cadres and adequate reinforcements, and with the accession of American military strength, the situation should, in my opinion, be so materially improved as to justify an expectation of obtaining satisfactory terms of peace."

This was the written opinion, these were the prophetic words of his Commander-in-Chief which the British Prime Minister tossed contemptuously aside and refused to consider.

Two days later Haig had luncheon in Downing Street. The other guests were Lord Reading, Lord Derby, Lord Robert Cecil, George Barnes, Winston Churchill and Colonel Hankey.

"We had a very cheery party. Conversation turned on the length of the war, and some betting took place. Derby bet the Prime Minister 100 cigars to 100 cigarettes that the war would be over by next New Year. L.G. disagreed. I said I thought the war would be over, because of the internal state of Germany. Reports indicate that she could not continue after the coming autumn. Her population was degenerating so fast that, even if she won, there would not be men to exploit and develop the industries of the country

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after the war. I also emphasised the critical nature of the coming four months on the western front if Germany did not make peace. Germany having only one million men as reserves for this year's fighting, I doubted whether they would risk them in an attempt to 'break through'. If the Germans did attack it would be a gambler's throw. All seemed to depend on the struggle now going on in Germany between the military and civil parties. If the military party won they would certainly attack, and try and deliver a knock-out blow against the western front. We must be prepared for this. The Prime Minister by cunning argument tried to get me to commit myself to an opinion that there would be 'no German offensive', that the 'German Army was done', but I refused to agree to his suggestions.

"After lunch I visited General Whigham in the War Office; and then with Butler I called on Winston Churchill at the Munitions Department. Churchill is really doing very well, and has quite stirred up his office. He supports the Army's demands well as against the Navy."

During these days in London pressure was brought upon Haig to make some of those changes in his staff which everybody except he himself believed to be necessary. With Charteris he had already been compelled to part. General Sir Herbert Lawrence, a 17th Lancer, a contemporary at the Staff College, and a companion in arms since South African days, had succeeded him. Haig, who had never lost his faith in Charteris, was much pleased when Lawrence, after having taken over his new duties, "spoke enthusiastically of the efficient state and good organisation of the Intelligence Branch, and gave it as his opinion that Charteris had produced a fine piece of work."

On New Year's day Lord Derby called on Haig in the morning and raised the question of Kiggell's health. Haig fought hard. If Kiggell's health gave way General Butler,

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who was working under Kiggell, was always there to replace him, and if Kiggell must go who would be better than Butler to succeed him? But these were not the views of Lord Derby, nor, he assured Haig, of the Cabinet, so that finally Haig was reduced to making the best terms he could for those who, he believed, had served him so faithfully. Butler was to have a corps and Kiggell was to command in Jersey. Lawrence was to succeed Kiggell and General Cox was to succeed Lawrence.

Haig returned to France on the 12th, and after dinner that evening "I broke the news to Kiggell that on account of the serious medical report from the doctors regarding his health, I had decided that it was better in the interests of the Army to make a change *now*, than to risk his health breaking down possibly at a critical moment in the course of the coming year's fighting which seemed likely to tax all our strength. I gave him the correspondence between Derby and myself to read. Kiggell said that he had at times felt rather done up, and was ready to do whatever I judged right. It made me very sad to have to make this decision, especially when I reflect over all I, and the whole Army, owe to Kiggell."

Another sad separation took place a few days afterwards. George Black, a young 17th Lancer of exceptional charm and distinction, had been one of his A.D.C.'s since the beginning of the war. But now he wanted "to see some fighting and be under fire". Haig was unhappy to part with him. His cheerful presence had brought gaiety into an atmosphere where it was not too common. He left a gap that could not be filled.

About the same time Haig was deprived of the assistance of Trenchard, who had served him so long and so successfully in command of the Royal Flying Corps in France. Every week it had been Trenchard's custom to report at

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G.H.Q. on the situation in the air. Haig had complete confidence in him and fought hard against the Government's decision to recall him to London to act as Chief of the Air Staff. He believed that Trenchard's presence in France would prove of "paramount importance" in the near future. "He has the experience of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  years' war behind him," Haig wrote to Lord Derby; "his influence and personality carry such weight with the various units of the R.F.C. that no new man could hope to fill his place adequately. It is not his advice on technical matters that I consider irreplaceable, but his power to raise the morale of the squadrons and individual pilots under the strenuous conditions that we must expect in the near future. . . . I cannot affirm my conviction too strongly that the removal of Trenchard's *personality* at the present juncture will be most prejudicial to the fighting efficiency and the morale of the R.F.C. in France."

This earnest plea fell upon deaf ears and Trenchard, who was succeeded by Major-General J. F. Salmond, returned to London in order to assist Lord Rothermere, whom the Prime Minister had recently appointed Secretary of State for Air.

Painlevé has left it upon record that at the meeting which he had with Lloyd George at Boulogne on the 25th September, it was secretly agreed between them that they should achieve unity of command on the western front in two stages.<sup>1</sup> The first stage was to be the creation of the Supreme War Council which should in fact be controlled by Foch and on which Henry Wilson, the intimate friend of Foch, should be the British representative; and in the second stage, when British public opinion had been properly prepared for it, Foch should openly take over the supreme command of the two armies.

<sup>1</sup>*Comment J'ai Nommé Foch et Pétain*, by Paul Painlevé, p. 245.

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This account seems somewhat at variance with the view subsequently expressed by Lloyd George in the House of Commons on November 19th, when he declared that he was "personally utterly opposed to the suggestion" of the creation of a Generalissimo, "for reasons into which it would not be desirable to enter". He went on to say that such a system "would not work. It would produce real friction, and might really produce not only friction between the armies, but friction between the nations and the governments."<sup>1</sup>

Lloyd George may have unintentionally conveyed to Painlevé a wrong impression of his opinion with regard to unity of command, but as to the desirability of the Supreme War Council he entertained no doubts, and the two Prime Ministers signed at the beginning of November at Rapallo the agreement which brought it into existence. The fact that Foch was at first nominated as the French and Wilson as the British military representative supports the accuracy of Painlevé's statement. On the other hand Lloyd George soon afterwards objected to Foch's holding the position on the ground that he was also Chief of the French Staff. The two positions should not, in Lloyd George's opinion, be held by the same individual, since one of his main objects in supporting the Supreme Council had been to circumvent the influence of Sir William Robertson. Foch was accordingly replaced by Weygand, a change which was not as important as it appeared, for everybody knew that Weygand would never express an opinion that was not the opinion of Foch.

The Supreme War Council first met at Versailles on the 1st December. This body, which was designed to co-ordinate all the efforts of the Allies and to exercise a controlling and decisive influence over the fortunes of the war,

<sup>1</sup>*Hansard*, vol. 99, column 896.

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then adjourned and did not meet again until the 30th January.

Meanwhile, however, the military representatives were not idle. During the interval between the two meetings of the Council they produced more than a dozen recommendations of varying degrees of importance. Most of these were merely pious expressions of opinion which called for no comment from the commanders in the field, but when they began to interfere with the disposal of troops Haig felt that the moment for protest had arrived.

On January 11th Henry Wilson wrote to him that they had come to the unanimous conclusion that the British line should be extended to some point between the river Ailette and the Soissons-Laon road. Wilson wrote that this decision had been reached both by mathematical calculations and also as the result of a "war game". In Henry Wilson's war games half his staff were deputed to play the part of Germans, putting their hats on the wrong way round to strengthen the illusion, and working out the plans which were likely to recommend themselves to the enemy. Haig had little patience with such methods. "The whole position", he wrote, "would be laughable if it were not so serious." For this recommendation, which had been officially forwarded by the military representatives to the British Government, not only interfered with Haig's plans, but raised in an acute form the whole question of the status of the Supreme Council. The fundamental unsoundness of the machinery was exposed. The Government had now two distinct sets of military advisers. On the one hand there was the Commander-in-Chief upon whom rested the whole responsibility for the welfare and safety of the troops, and who reported to the Government through the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. On the other hand, there was the Supreme War Council, upon whom rested

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no responsibility whatever, and who were independent of the British War Office. What is most surprising in the subsequent history of the Supreme War Council is not that it accomplished so little good, but that it fortunately did not accomplish a great deal of evil. Robertson shared Haig's contempt for it. "These wise men", he wrote to Haig, "have settled the extension of your front to their satisfaction by recommending that you should go about half way between Barisis and Berry-au-Bac. You were prepared to go to the first place and the French wanted you to go to the second. What the Versailles experts have done is to suggest a compromise, which is no more than any political conference would have done and has done in the past."

Fortunately relations between Haig and Pétain were most friendly. Pétain was, upon the whole, the French general with whom Haig found it the easiest to deal. So long as they understood one another the danger of interference from Versailles could be reduced to a minimum.

As the time approached for the next meeting of the Supreme Council interviews between the two Commanders-in-Chief became more frequent, and on the 24th January a full dress conference took place at Compiègne.

"At 10 a.m. we attended a conference in the Palace where the G.Q.G. is now established.

"Pétain put me opposite him, and we sat in big arm chairs. It was a charming room, lofty with big windows.

"Pétain began the meeting by asking Robertson to state what he wanted to discuss because he (Robertson) had called the meeting and no agenda had been issued.

"Robertson said that he wished to know for the British Government what our arrangements in France are for defence; next the state of the American forces in France; whether a General Reserve can be formed; and whether some troops cannot now be withdrawn from Italy.

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“After Pétain and I had explained our plans, Foch talked most volubly over the advantages of acting offensively. Admirably in theory, but not practically because we have not the forces. Moreover, our defensive plans include several positions prepared for offensive action by way of counter-attack.

“Much time was wasted in discussing Foch’s theories, and also over the American position. It was evident that Pétain thought little of Foch, and that there is considerable friction between them. There is also friction between Pershing and Pétain. And the latter told me that he is tired of the Americans, who are doing very little to fit themselves for battle. We all lunched with Pétain about 12.30 and afterwards I took the opportunity of pressing on Pershing the importance of getting well trained instructors for his troops, and to do all he could to get his units to work well with the French.

“Pershing is a good honest fellow, and is quite alive to the need of this, and is doing his best, but he ‘finds the French very trying’, as I know well.

“After lunch I went back to the château with Robertson and had a talk over the situation. I told him definitely that with the troops at my disposal I could not extend my line to Berry-au-Bac (another 14 miles). And that it was my intention to decline to do so, whatever the Supreme Council in Paris might say. Robertson quite agreed and showed me a paper he had written supporting me.”

The question of the General Reserve was to prove the source of much controversy during the weeks that lay ahead. The two armies were now awaiting attack. The desirability of having a powerful body of troops in reserve which could, at the critical moment, be thrown into the battle wherever needed was obvious. Foch, as the general to whom the command of the reserve would be entrusted,



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was naturally most insistent upon its creation. Haig's attitude was, as usual, straightforward and easily comprehensible. He recognised that in accordance with sound military principles a General Reserve would be highly advantageous, but he also recognised that he had barely sufficient troops at his disposal to protect the length of front that had been committed to his charge. If any more of those troops were taken from him he could no longer bear that responsibility. If, therefore, they desired to form a General Reserve, let them, by all means, do so, but they must find the troops in Italy or bring them from the Balkans, for he could not afford to part with a single division.

On January 29th "I motored to Versailles with all my party about 11 a.m. The Supreme War Council is housed in a great new hotel building, the Trianon Palace Hotel. An air of unreality prevailed, looking at the place from a war point of view.

"I was shown upstairs and into Sir H. Wilson's room, where Lloyd George, Lord Milner, Wilson, Hankey and Robertson were in consultation with Generals Pershing, Bliss and Captain Boyd (A.D.C.). The arguments seemed heated, and I gathered that Pershing had stated that he was opposed to giving a battalion of Americans to each British brigade. Evidently something had happened to upset him since I saw him at Compiègne. I gathered that the people in America were criticising their Government because there seemed to be no results to show for the money which America has been spending. No troops in the field, no aeroplanes, no guns, no nothing yet in fact. After a time I pointed out that the battalions would come to me for training, and would then be grouped together into American regiments and divisions. At once Pershing's attitude changed and he said that he was quite agreeable to send 150 battalions to the British Army on the lines I had indicated.

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I also took the opportunity of stating definitely my opinion that the situation of the Allies in France would become very serious in September unless steps were at once taken to raise more men for the British Army as well as to bring as many American troops as possible to Europe. Calculating on half a million casualties in the British and French armies respectively, the British would in nine months be reduced by 30 divisions, and the French by 53 divisions.

“After the meeting I gave Colonel Hankey a note showing in detail how I arrived at this estimate. He said he would do his best to get the Prime Minister to give his attention to the matter.

“We had a walk in the park of Versailles Château, then lunched at the Hôtel des Réservoirs, and at 2.30 p.m. attended a conference at the headquarters of the Supreme Council with the Prime Minister and Lord Milner. We first discussed the demand of the French to extend the British front, and I gave the Prime Minister detailed reasons why we should not extend our front. Sir H. Wilson insisted that Pétain was ‘not playing straight’, but said one thing to me and another to his Government. I can’t believe this, but think Wilson has never forgiven Pétain for having him removed last May from being the head of the British mission at French G.Q.G.

“We also discussed the question of a General Reserve for the western front. I said that I could not spare troops for that, but recommended that British troops in Italy and elsewhere should be set free for this purpose.”

The next day Haig again drove out to Versailles and attended the meeting of the Supreme War Council. “M. Clemenceau presided and Lloyd George was on his left, with the British on *his* left. The French representatives were on the right of the President. Italians sat opposite the latter, and a couple of Americans with them. Clemenceau began

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by asking us to discuss the allied plans for next year. Foch led off with a speech of generalities; Robertson followed, then I was called upon.

"I pointed out that before we could make plans, we must know what means we had at our disposal. In my opinion, the situation was now serious on the western front, and might become grave in September, unless more fighting men were provided.

"I gave an estimate in divisions of our receipts in men for nine months, and, estimating for a loss of half a million if enemy attacked, I showed that the British should be prepared for a reduction of thirty divisions by the autumn unless action were taken at once to get men.

"I pointed out that the American Army could not be trained sufficiently to operate in divisions this year.

"General Pétain followed and supported me in every way. He said that *without* fighting, and allowing only for normal wastage, he must reduce 25 divisions by the autumn.

"I was very pleased at the way Pétain backed me up, and this without any preliminary talk or argument. Lloyd George followed and asked for detailed figures. This, no doubt, to give him time to think over the situation which he admits is serious."

The Supreme War Council sat for three more days. On the 31st Haig summarised the work done as follows, "Our shortage of men in the field had been demonstrated and Lloyd George had shown himself anxious to prove by figures that we had ample men on the western front."

On the 1st February the Council met at 10 a.m. "After some more talk it was agreed to accept the recommendations of the military members of the Supreme War Council to adopt a defensive attitude for the present until the situation developed, with a request that Commanders-in-Chief

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should prepare offensive projects suitable for the forces at their disposal. Nothing should be done to weaken the allied forces on the western front, but Lloyd George insisted on going on with his schemes for the destruction of the Turks. Clemenceau said that he could not prevent Great Britain doing what she thought best in this matter, but he got Lloyd George to agree that nothing should be done for two months. After that time Clemenceau hoped to have the situation again discussed by the Versailles Council. On that understanding, the Turkish project was passed. Robertson then put in a minute of dissent to the effect that the military members of this War Council did not know all the factors of the problem on which they had made a recommendation. Robertson considered the scheme was quite unsound, and gave his advice against it. I am strongly of the same opinion, but Lloyd George never asked my opinion.

"I saw Lloyd George was much annoyed with Robertson, but he said nothing at the time. Later he told Robertson that, having given his advice in London, it was not necessary for him to have repeated it here.

"I lunched at the Hôtel des Réservoirs along with Lawrence, Davidson and Philip.

"When we assembled in the afternoon the question of an interallied Reserve, how it should be organised, and who should command it, was discussed till after 6 p.m. Finally, it was decided to think the question over and put forward draft proposals on the morrow.

"I got back to Paris at 7.30 p.m., a very long day, and much time wasted due to much talking by civilians on military matters, of the basic principles of which they know nothing."

The next day "we met at Versailles at 10.30 a.m. M. Clemenceau had a private meeting (as usual) with Lloyd

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George half an hour before, in order to settle privately the decisions at which it was intended to arrive in full conference.

“As the result of the night in which it was possible to think over the problem, several proposals were produced on the question of a General Reserve. Amongst these was one from Lloyd George, which appointed Foch as president of the committee, to deal with the matter, and issue orders to Commanders-in-Chief as to when and where the Reserve is to be used; to decide (in consultation with Commanders-in-Chief) the strength of the General Reserve.

“This was the proposal which was accepted after some discussion, and a few amendments. To some extent it makes Foch a Generalissimo. But, although Pétain and I get on very well and no co-ordinating authority is necessary for us, on the other hand the Italian front needs a central authority.

“When the four representatives (Clemenceau, Lloyd George, Orlando, Bliss) had approved of the resolution, I asked the following question: ‘By what channel am I to receive orders from this new body?’ This was rather a poser, because this resolution to appoint an international committee involves a change in constitutional procedure. Finally Lloyd George said, ‘Orders would be issued by the members of the body nominated by the Supreme Council.’ I asked that the exact position might be made clear to me in writing.

“The next question discussed was the extension of the British front. Clemenceau had previously told me that he persisted in raising this point on account of the necessity of getting more men from England to make sure of holding the front until the Americans could take their share of the fighting.

“I made a few remarks, and stated that, with my present

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strength, it was quite out of the question for me to extend my line. Notwithstanding the table of figures compiled for the conference, my statement of Wednesday last holds good, viz. that we must expect to have to reduce 30 divisions in nine months if the enemy attacks us heavily. Eventually it was agreed to accept the proposed extension *in principle*, but it was left to Pétain and myself to decide when to carry it out. After this Pétain came along to me and said that 'he had no intention to worry (taquiner) me over this'."

Pétain proved as good as his word and an amicable arrangement was shortly afterwards arrived at between the two Commanders-in-Chief whereby the British line was extended as far as Barisis.

Haig's view with regard to the appointment of a Generalissimo was plain from the start. So long as he and Pétain saw eye to eye it was unnecessary on the western front, but if he and Pétain differed upon an important issue the whole situation would be changed.

The constitutional issue, however, which Haig, with remarkable rapidity for one untrained in constitutional law, had pointed out, was a serious one. He was responsible to the Army Council who, in their turn, were responsible to Parliament and the country for the safety of the troops. He could take orders from the Army Council, or from a senior Field-Marshal, but from nobody else in the world. But now it had been laid down at Versailles that Foch or the executive committee in charge of the General Reserve had certain powers to dispose of British troops without the consent of any third party. The Army Council a few days later agreed unanimously "that the constitution of the executive committee as it now stands would not only place Commanders-in-Chief in an impossible position, but would also deprive the Council of the responsi-

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bility entrusted to them under the constitution of the realm, and that any such abrogation of that responsibility would be a violation of the trust reposed in them."

The situation was awkward, but the agile brain of the Prime Minister saw not only a solution of the difficulty but also an opportunity of accomplishing his most immediate purpose, which was to get rid of his Chief of the Imperial General Staff. The first step was to get Haig to come to London. He arrived there on the afternoon of the 9th February. He was met at the station by Lady Haig and Lord Derby. The latter immediately took possession of him and drove him off to Downing Street—"by a circuitous route, so as to have a talk and explain the situation. Briefly, the Cabinet had decided on the previous day to replace Sir W. Robertson as C.I.G.S. On that my opinion would not be asked. He then produced a copy of draft instructions arranging for the new order of things, on the following lines:

"The Secretary of State for War was again to assume full responsibility for the War Office, and the C.I.G.S.'s position was to return again to what it was before Robertson was appointed in Lord Kitchener's time. The C.I.G.S. is to continue to be the 'Supreme Military Adviser of the Government'. 'The Military Representative at Versailles to be a Member of the Army Council', and to be a 'Deputy C.I.G.S.' It was proposed that orders should be sent to me regarding the handling of the 'interallied General Reserve' by the latter. I told Derby of the draft letter which Henry Wilson had sent to me this morning on the question of forming a 'General Reserve', and which clearly shows that he and Foch were practically in the position of a 'Generalissimo' commanding all Allied Armies in France.

"On reaching Downing Street we went straight to the Council room and found the Prime Minister there with

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Mr. Macpherson (the Under Secretary of State for War). The Prime Minister then explained his views and difficulties. I pointed out the tremendous powers now given to Versailles, that the Military Representatives there had full powers to commit the Government (*possibly against my opinion*) and take decisions which the British Government ought alone to take. He said as Prime Minister he was anxious to get into more direct touch with me as Commander-in-Chief in France, and that under the present system he always felt that in seeing me he was going behind the back of the C.I.G.S. I suggested that Robertson's original proposal, by which he (as C.I.G.S.) after consultation with Foch, should send me orders re Reserves was probably the best solution of the difficulty. The Prime Minister said he had come to the same conclusion, and he proposed to send Robertson to Versailles as Military Representative, and to make Henry Wilson C.I.G.S.

"This came as a pleasant surprise to Derby, who evidently was much exercised in his mind as to how to get out of his present difficulty with Robertson. The latter had lately become more difficult to deal with, and lost his temper quickly, he told me.

"The draft decision was accordingly revised so as to make the Military Representative at Versailles 'absolutely free and unfettered in the advice which he gives, but he is to report to C.I.G.S. the nature of advice given for information of the Cabinet, and C.I.G.S. will advise Cabinet thereon'.

"I warned the Prime Minister and Derby of the distrust in which Henry Wilson is held by the Army. Derby said that he would issue instructions in the War Office to ensure that staff appointments are fairly made.

"The Prime Minister also said that he considered that the best solution of their present difficulties would be to



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make me 'Generalissimo' of *all* the British forces. Derby concurred and I was asked what I thought of the proposal. I replied that with a serious attack pending in France, I considered that no change should be made in the command there, even though the change might be to my personal advantage. I knew every detail of the situation, and it would not be fair to the Army suddenly to appoint a new commander in such a grave emergency. The Prime Minister agreed, and said he 'ought to have made me Generalissimo last September.'

"A copy of the agreement was duly signed by the Prime Minister and Derby, and I received a copy.

"I met Doris in her mother's house in Seymour Street, and we then motored to Kingston Hill.

"Doris and I dined quietly together."

Haig passed a peaceful Sunday with his wife and on Monday morning, called at the War Office where he learnt from Lord Derby that Robertson had refused to accept the suggested arrangement. Robertson was a proud man with a great career behind him. He took the orthodox army point of view with regard to personalities, and it doubtless seemed to him a hard thing that he should have risen from the ranks to the pinnacle of C.I.G.S. in order to end as deputy to Henry Wilson. It is impossible not to sympathise with the rugged old soldier; but Haig, single-minded as ever, was thinking only of the war. After his conversation with Lord Derby he writes: "I then went to Robertson's room. He said he had no intention of accepting the appointment at Versailles. The position would be impossible, for all information was in the hands of the C.I.G.S. in London. I disagreed, and said that as the British Member of the Versailles Committee he was in the position of 'Generalissimo', and further that this was no time for anyone to question where his services were to be given. It was his

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*duty* to go to Versailles or anywhere else if the Government wished it. I am afraid that in the back of his mind he resents Henry Wilson replacing him in London.”

Haig had an interview with the King the same morning and returned to France in the afternoon.

Two days later he visited the Fifth Army, and carefully inspected their system of defence. Believing that an attack was pending and that it was likely to fall upon this sector of the front, he had none the less decided that with the limited, and indeed insufficient, troops at his disposal it was in this sector that he could least afford to concentrate his strength. The armies were now arranged as follows. The northernmost was Rawlinson's, which was for the present called the Fourth Army, but was shortly to resume the name of the Second Army when Plumer once more took command of it. On its right lay the First Army under Horne; then came Byng's Third Army and finally the Fifth Army under Gough. The Second Army covered a front of twenty-three miles; the First Army one of thirty-three miles; the Third Army twenty-eight miles and the Fifth Army forty-two miles.

Two good reasons justified Haig's decision to hold his left more strongly than his right. In the first place defeat on the left might mean the loss of the Channel ports and the cutting off of the British Army from its base. In the second place French reinforcements could reach his right far more rapidly than they could reach his left. He would not put his faith in a General Reserve controlled by an executive committee from Versailles, but he had agreed with Pétain that each of them should be ready to support the other in emergency. But if the blow fell on Plumer it could hardly be hoped that Pétain's support would arrive in time, whereas if it fell on Gough the distance that the French troops would have to cover would be the shortest possible.

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It was therefore the position of the Fifth Army which was causing Haig most anxiety when he visited it on February 13th. He met Sir Hubert Gough at Jussy and found him "as usual, very fit, active and in the best of spirits". Together they "looked at the crossings of the canal, planned some extra ones and then examined some of the wire and trenches. Everything seemed carefully thought out, and if only we have another month to work, this sector *ought* to be very strong". During that day and the next he inspected the various corps, divisions and brigades. "At the conclusion I said a few words to the brigadiers and commanding officers of battalions and encouraged them to maintain smartness and discipline, esprit de corps, etc. I told them to be ready for a *heavy attack*."

But home politics continually obtruded themselves upon these urgent preparations for the coming battle. Early in the morning of the 15th February, "cypher personal telegram from Lord Derby arrived 1 a.m. It stated that Robertson had been offered choice of Versailles or remaining where he is, but had decided to resign, claiming that it is necessary to be both C.I.G.S. and Government representative on the Council at Versailles. Government is now offering position to Plumer. He would like to see me, as he thinks a talk would be an advantage.

"I replied that I consider only permanent solution of difficulty is that C.I.G.S. should have his deputy at Versailles in same way that the French have Foch with a subordinate general at Versailles. And I added that I would come to London to-morrow afternoon to see him.

"I sent Sassoon to Montreuil to arrange for my journey. Everything arranged when Derby's private secretary states the Prime Minister would rather that Derby came to Boulogne to see me. I reply that I am coming to London and desire to see the Prime Minister.

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"I decide on this course because the latter is stating that I am 'in agreement with the Government'. I am anxious not to embarrass the Government at this time, but I am *not* in agreement on all the decisions passed regarding Versailles. For instance, I agree on the need of forming a General Reserve, but not on the system of control which has been set up."

That night, "General Gough came to dine and stayed the night on the train. We discussed his defences. He complained of the shortage of labour for the work. I reminded him that whenever we had attacked we had always been able to break the enemy's front, and to advance well into the German system of defence. We must expect the Germans to do the same if they attacked in force. So his 'Reserve Lines' must have his attention."

Haig spent the night in the train and arrived at Doullens at eight in the morning. At 9.15 he had an interview with Loucheur, the French Minister of Munitions, and at ten he held a conference of his army commanders. "All were present. General Cox gave a very clear account of the situation of the enemy, emphasised his greatly increased strength and *indicated that we must be prepared to meet a very severe attack at any moment now*. After army commanders had stated their views on the situation on their respective army fronts, and their arrangements for defence, we discussed the handling of reserves and the action of artillery on the defensive. All felt confident of being able to hold their front.

"We finished about 12.30. I then motored to Beaulieu Château, had lunch and went at once to Boulogne. There a destroyer was waiting for me. I left at 3 p.m. and reached London by special train at 5.30 p.m.

"The Secretary of State for War met me at the station and motored with me to Kingston Hill. He told me that Robertson had declined to serve either as C.I.G.S. on the

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new conditions, or to be Military Representative at Versailles, so Sir H. Wilson had been appointed C.I.G.S. He would call for me at 11.30 a.m. to-morrow and take me to see the Prime Minister.

"I found Doris looking very fit and well. How petty all this squabbling in high places is, compared with the great problem of beating Germany, and the present anxiety of commanders in France."

Robertson called on Haig at 9.30 next morning. Haig explained that he had never been asked whether he approved of the new scheme, but only whether he was satisfied with the proposed arrangement whereby he was to receive orders. He had replied that the constitutional difficulty had been got over by the fact that the British representative at Versailles would henceforth be a member of the Army Council and that therefore the Army Council would be responsible for any orders that he gave. He added, however, that he had never approved of the new system, nor of the Foch committee for creating and commanding the General Reserve, "nor indeed of the Versailles military organisation itself".

Later in the morning he drove down with Lord Derby to the Prime Minister's country house. "Lloyd George had been ill, and was resting upstairs when we arrived. He came down and saw Derby and myself together. In the course of our talk, I made it quite clear to the Prime Minister that I had never approved of any of the arrangements now under discussion. When asked, I had stated my reasons for disagreeing, but once the Cabinet had given its decision I had loyally done my best to make the system run. I had only one object in view, viz. to beat the Germans. Lloyd George said that was so, and warmly thanked me. Lloyd George left the room for a moment, and Derby said that I had put my position quite clearly to the Prime Minister.

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“If the latter made any mis-statement regarding me in the House of Commons on this subject, he was prepared to get up in the House of Lords and deny it flatly.”

Haig returned to Kingston for luncheon and in the afternoon Henry Wilson called on him. Together they agreed that Rawlinson should fill the vacant situation at Versailles on the understanding that he should be immediately replaced by Plumer in command of his army.

The next morning he had an interview with Bonar Law at the latter's request. “He received me at once and stated as his reason for wishing to see me that he was to be asked certain questions on the military situation and might be cross questioned as to my views and attitude, and so wished to be clear as to what to say. I explained, as I did yesterday to the Prime Minister, that my opinion as to the merits or otherwise of the proposed organisation had never been asked, only whether I was satisfied with the proposed channel of communication between the Government and myself. That the general representing the British Government on the Versailles Committee, being now a member of the Army Council, rendered any instructions which I received from him ‘lawful commands’ (in the meaning of the Army Act). My objections were therefore satisfied.

“He spoke very freely, and I told him that difficulties might arise between me and Versailles if I were ordered to earmark certain divisions as General Reserve. This could not be done without upsetting existing plans for the defence of my front, and I would rather be relieved of my command than do it.

“Mr. Law said that the Prime Minister had asked him to read a statement of the position of affairs, as he was ill. Law was not going to do it, but he would like my opinion on what was done regarding myself. The document stated that I ‘thought it a workable scheme’. I said that was not my

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opinion, because I thought it a bad scheme and unsound, since it set up *two* authorities who would give me orders, i.e. dual control. He must not say that I thought the scheme workable, but that I will do my best to work under it. He said that he quite saw my point, and would make that clear if asked.

"I next visited the War Office. I met Lord Derby on the main staircase. He told me that he had placed his resignation in the hands of the War Cabinet, and they could either accept it or not as they deemed right. I said I was very pleased to hear that he had decided to remain on.

"Field-Marshal French then passed me on the stairs. We greeted each other in a very friendly manner; he asked me to call in and see him even for a few minutes whenever I came to London. Derby said he had fixed up with French to take Robertson as G.O.C. Eastern Command.

"I next saw Sir W. Robertson. I told him what had happened at my interview with the Prime Minister yesterday and Bonar Law to-day. He seemed in a more restful mood; he did not think the Government would go out, but great difficulties in his opinion lay ahead.

"I then went over to the Horse Guards and saw Viscount French. He was very pleased to see me—said he had been afraid that the paper on the military situation in the west which he wrote might have put me against him. He wished our friendship to be as in days gone by. I asked him to come to France when things are quieter. As regards his paper, I held strongly that his plan for sending troops from the western front to fight against the Turks might bring about our defeat.

"Doris and I then went to buy two books for the children, and took a walk in Bond Street. We lunched at Eastcott and in the afternoon motored to the far end of Richmond Park, and walked most of the way home.

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“About 5 p.m. Sir H. Rawlinson arrived from France. I explained the situation, and offered him the post of Military Representative at Versailles. He accepted it, and assured me that he was only anxious to serve where I thought he could be of most use. He was also prepared to decline the appointment, if I thought that it was in the interest of the Service that he should do so.

“Doris and I dined quietly together.

“Another air raid, but very little noise heard near this home.”

When he returned to France the next day he summed up the situation as follows: “I think I can fairly claim, as the result of my visit to London, that generally a saner view is now taken of the so-called military crisis, and the risk of a quarrel between civilian and soldier, which last Saturday seemed imminent, has been avoided.”

Not only would such a quarrel have been deplorable in its effect upon the conduct of the war, but also the result of it would not have been likely to prove favourable for the soldiers. The next day, “I read Lloyd George’s speech in the *Times* of this morning regarding the differences which had arisen between the Government and Sir W. Robertson. The Prime Minister of course makes out an excellent case for himself, which the bulk of the House (not understanding military matters) thoroughly endorses. Indeed, Sir William comes out of the controversy as a ‘mulish, irreconcilable individual’. This must, I think, always be the result of controversies between statesmen and soldiers in which the issue is not simple, and when the former tell the story. Sir William would have done better to have resigned when the Government rejected his advice regarding the western front, and decided on sending an expedition to Syria to fight the Turks.

“Opposition statesmen shed crocodile tears over



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Robertson's departure, but human nature being what it is, the latter is well nigh forgotten already."

A few days later Clemenceau came to dinner. "He is most active and alert in mind and body, though 76 years of age. He has always drunk water, but eats well. After dinner he came to my room and had a quiet talk for half an hour. His intention was merely to come and pay his respects to me at my headquarters, but after seeing Pétain yesterday he felt in some difficulty. He spoke quite frankly. Some friction had arisen between Foch and Pétain, and he was uncertain how to act over the question of Reserves which Foch claimed to control as the result of the decision of the Versailles conference.

"As regards interallied Reserves, I said that I had told my Prime Minister that I could not earmark any divisions at the present time as an interallied Reserve without upsetting my plans for defence. I only had six divisions under my own hand at the present moment. And that rather than change my plans at a time when, at any moment, the enemy might attack in force, I would prefer to resign my command.

"M. Clemenceau at once said that my statement indicated his line of action. He would arrange to 'écarter' (set aside) Foch gradually. He personally looked upon a close agreement between Pétain and myself as the surest guarantee of success.

"... Clemenceau and I parted great friends. He said he had only one object, namely, to beat the Germans."

On the 25th of the month Henry Wilson arrived at G.H.Q. and Haig was again pressed to earmark certain divisions for the General Reserve. He made the same reply that he had made to Clemenceau. On this subject he was as firm as a rock because he believed that the safety of the Army was involved. He would resign his command rather

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than budge an inch. Rawlinson was also on a visit to G.H.Q. and firmly supported Haig's attitude. The fact that he was now the British representative at Versailles in place of Wilson proved of value to Haig in two ways. In the first place Rawlinson was loyal to him; and in the second place Wilson, being now C.I.G.S. in London, was no longer anxious to magnify the importance or increase the power of the Supreme War Council at Versailles.

Still more fortunate was the fact that Clemenceau preferred Pétain to Foch and was prepared to support Haig in refusing to give way in the matter of the General Reserve. If Henry Wilson had remained at Versailles, and if he and Foch working together had had the support of the French Prime Minister on this issue, Haig might have been driven to resignation, a new Commander-in-Chief appointed, and the British front still further denuded of troops in this fateful month of March.

On the 5th Rawlinson arrived from Versailles, having been sent by Foch, with the support of his Italian and American colleagues to make a further effort to persuade Haig to alter his decision with regard to the General Reserve. Seven divisions were this time demanded and the executive committee had decided that, if the request were refused, they would report to their respective Governments that owing to the refusal their role was non-existent and that they had better be dissolved. Haig replied that he could not possibly alter his decision "since the possibilities of having to meet an attack grew greater every day", and Rawlinson, who was in entire agreement, telephoned accordingly to Versailles.

The early days of the month of March were busily occupied in making final preparations to resist the great attack which was now almost hourly expected. On the 2nd a conference of army commanders was held at Doullens, when

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Cox, the new head of the Intelligence in France, reported that the attack was likely to be delivered on the fronts of the Third and Fifth Armies. Further information to the same effect was received the next day, and reports from French G.Q.G. of the movement of German troops from France to Russia and of the postponement of the offensive were disregarded, as French sources of information were now considered distinctly inferior to British.

On the 4th Haig addressed a letter of exasperated protest to the Secretary of State owing to the War Cabinet's decision to postpone the return of Plumer from Italy. Haig had consented to Rawlinson's going to Versailles only on condition that Plumer should resume command of the Second Army. Now, on the eve of the great battle, he was still deprived of one of his best army commanders. The War Cabinet had acted without consulting the Secretary of State for War. Lord Derby lost no time in putting the matter right, telegraphing to Plumer to return to France without delay. At the same time Lord Derby wrote strongly advocating the removal of General Gough from the command of the Fifth Army, a change which he said that the Prime Minister was anxious to see effected. But Haig had not lost faith in Gough, and would in any case have refused to change an army commander at such a moment.

On the 6th Haig visited Pétain. The two were in complete agreement on the question of the General Reserve and were strengthened by the knowledge that they had Clemenceau behind them. They agreed also that the work of the Versailles Council should be of a purely advisory character, and that no council or committee should ever be charged with the disposal of troops. Pétain's suggestion for obtaining greater unity had been to divide the whole of the

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western European front, including the Italian front, into two parts, giving to Haig supreme command from the sea to Verdun and retaining the remainder himself. Haig thought there was much to be said for the scheme, but it had not found favour and was now abandoned.

The 7th, 8th and 9th of March were devoted by the Commander-in-Chief to a close inspection of that part of the front where it was now anticipated with increasing certainty that the blow would be delivered. He began on the 7th with the III Corps on the extreme right, and with the 58th Division who were in touch with the French. "As the result of my visit to the III Corps area," he wrote, "I think it has a very wide front to defend with three divisions, but for a considerable portion of that front there are river and marsh obstacles, which are said to be impassable at the present time." Unfortunately, however, the weather, with that perversity that affected it throughout the war, had been so exceptionally dry during the early spring that streams proved fordable and bogs were firm, which should have contributed towards the defences of the Fifth Army.

"On the whole," Haig concluded, "I don't like the position and . . . as a result of my visit I ordered the 50th Division to move south to reinforce Fifth Army area from Fourth Army. I have no more troops available to send him, without uncovering *vital* points elsewhere."

On the next day he visited the XVIII Corps, commanded by General Maxse, and on the day after the V and VII Corps, which brought him into the zone of the Third Army. He held lengthy conversations with corps and divisional commanders and went carefully into the disposition of their forces, asking questions and making suggestions with regard to their plans of defence. Everywhere he found keenness and efficiency. Only one thing was lacking—sufficiency of numbers. "The man-power position is

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most unsatisfactory," he wrote on the 10th. "In January, thanks to the excellent health of the troops, we were 7,000 men up on our estimate. But with heavy fighting in prospect and very few men coming in the prospects are bad. We are told that we can only expect 18,000 drafts in April. We are all right under normal conditions for men for the next three months, but I fear the autumn. And still more do I fear the situation *after the enemy has started the attack.*"

On the 12th he crossed to England and on the 13th called on Lord Derby at the War Office. "Before I consented to talk about anything I placed before him the serious situation as regards drafts. By June our shortage will amount to 100,000. He showed me a note which the members of the Army Council had approved. They had arrived independently at the same conclusions as I had. In view of the urgency he ordered the note to be copied and issued to the War Cabinet *at once.*"

On the 14th there took place in London the third meeting of the Supreme War Council.

"I visited Downing Street at 10 a.m. and had a long talk with the Prime Minister and Mr. Bonar Law until nearly 11 a.m. I pointed out that the deficiency of men would make the situation critical by June. If the enemy attacked, our position would be worse. In the month 7th April to 7th May last year the Germans ran through 47 divisions and they actually had 42 in reserve when our attacks began. We must expect *at least* to suffer similar losses.

"They did their best to get me to say that the Germans would not attack. The Prime Minister remarked that I had 'given my opinion that the Germans would only attack against small portions of our front'. I said that 'I had never said that. The question put to me was if I were a German general and confronted by the present situation would I attack'. . . . I now said that the German Army and its

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leaders seem drunk with their success in Russia and the middle east, so that it is impossible to foretell what they may not attempt. In any case, we must be prepared to meet *a very strong attack indeed on a 50-mile front, and for this, drafts are urgently required.*

"We then spoke about the question of forming a General Reserve. Lloyd George did his best to frighten me into agreeing to earmark certain divisions. He spoke of all the other general Commanders-in-Chief having agreed and I alone stood out. He then tried to flatter and wheedle me. I was equally firm. I said amongst other things that this was a military question of which I was the best judge. I only had eight divisions under my hand; the position of these *may* vary from day to day, and only the Commander-in-Chief in close touch with the situation could handle them. Versailles was too distant and not in touch with the actual military situation.

"Finally Lloyd George agreed that it was too late to touch my divisions now, in view of the apparent imminence of a large attack.

"About 11 a.m., Lloyd George had a talk with M. Clemenceau (the French Premier) and at 11.30 the full conference met.

"Before we sat down, M. Clemenceau came to me and said 'it is all arranged about the reserves, I have seen M. Lloyd George'.

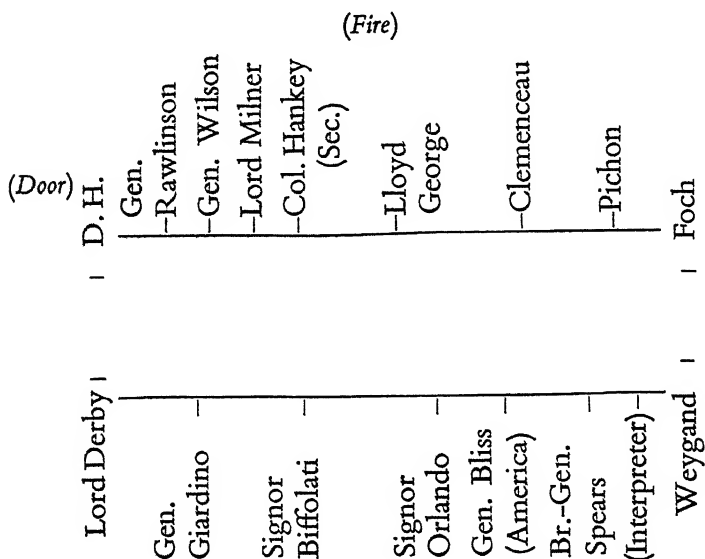
"The question of the General Reserve was the first point dealt with—Lloyd George opened the discussion and put my case very well. He finally proposed that, although neither I nor Pétain could contribute towards the General Reserve at once, the intention to form a Reserve should still be maintained, and that as the American troops arrived and set free British and French units, the decision should be given effect to.

## CALM BEFORE STORM

“Colonel Hankey drafted a very skilful decision on these lines which was unanimously adopted at the afternoon sitting.

“The conference sat till about 1 o’clock. We then adjourned till 3.45 p.m.

“The following sketch shows who were present, and how we sat at the table.



“I went to lunch with Henrietta and Doris at 21 Princes Gate. After lunch I took Doris for  $\frac{3}{4}$  hour walk in the Park, and then motored to Downing Street.

“When the resolution on the question of the inter-allied Reserve was formally put to the meeting, in reply to Lloyd George’s question if anyone had anything further to say, General Foch asked leave to speak. He stated that he ‘objected to the whole resolution’. This led to a wordy altercation between Clemenceau and him, which finally ended by Clemenceau waving his hand and shouting ‘silence’.

## CALM BEFORE STORM

“Clemenceau then thoroughly sat on Foch!

“Several other matters were discussed in which I was not greatly concerned as Commander-in-Chief in France.

“We adjourned about 6 p.m. When Foch bade me good night he said in rather bitter chaff, ‘only in London can military matters now be regulated’.”

Another meeting was held on the following day when the question of air bombing was discussed. Haig throughout the war adhered to the view that the bombing of defenceless towns was as wrong from a military as it was from an ethical standpoint.

“The first question discussed was regarding our policy in the matter of air bombing. M. Clemenceau asked me some questions. I read a few notes which I had had prepared in consultation with Trenchard.

“Briefly I stated that we only bombed objectives of military importance, namely factories, mines, camps and military junctions, that we had three squadrons (bombing) near Nancy, and these would be increased to eight by June. I also explained how the work was divided between ourselves and the French. Lastly I recommended that the bombing should be continued, notwithstanding that the enemy retaliated on London and Paris.

“M. Clemenceau (who came and sat by me when I was speaking) said that he entirely agreed with all I had said, and recommended that my paper be at once accepted by the War Cabinet. Bonar Law had meantime arrived, and now said that what I had stated was contrary to what he had told the House of Commons. He had there stated that the British now ‘by way of retaliation bombed German towns’, i.e. we had no military objective. Clemenceau did not wish in any way to interfere with the British Government, all he wanted was to assure the French Chamber that British aeroplanes ‘only bombed military objects’ when



## CALM BEFORE STORM

they started from the French lines! 'And whatever Mr. Bonar Law had told the House of Commons, the result was as stated by the Field-Marshal.' After some further discussion a resolution based on my memorandum was accepted."

On these same ides of March an event occurred of deep importance in the life of Haig. Between eleven o'clock and midnight a son was born to him. Colonel Ryan of the Royal Army Medical Corps, who had been with him during the retreat from Mons and ever since, was in attendance. Haig was now nearly fifty-seven and must have almost given up hope of handing to an heir the ancient name which he had inherited and to which he had added such great renown. When therefore the news was brought that the child was a boy and that all was well, words failed him. He threw his arms round the astonished Colonel and, as the latter has described it, "kissed me like a Frenchman". Very seldom was any man privileged to see behind the mask of stern reserve with which Haig concealed from the world a sensitive and intensely human heart.

The next morning, having paid a visit to Buckingham Palace, where he received the warm congratulations of his King and Queen, he had barely time to hold his little son for a moment in his arms before he hurried back to the seat of war, there to await the coming of the great attack.

■

## Chapter XXIII

# THE GREAT ATTACK

It was before eight o'clock on the morning of March 21st and the Commander-in-Chief had not finished dressing when the Chief of Staff came into his room to inform him that the great attack had begun. Despite the elaborate precautions that the Germans had taken to conceal their intentions, both the date and the place of the attack had been anticipated by the British Intelligence Service with remarkable accuracy. All possible preparations to meet it had been made, but the reinforcements which Haig had never ceased to demand had been denied him and, if he had consented to the further depletion of his force by detaching troops to be sent to Italy or to form part of a General Reserve, the very narrow margin which finally divided the Allies from complete disaster might have been obliterated.

The story of this battle is therefore one of a defensive force, outnumbered, fighting a series of rearguard actions and offering so stubborn a resistance that in the end the attackers were exhausted and incapable of pressing their advantage home. New methods were employed by the enemy. The German genius for war discovered a fresh device for making the most of their diminishing resources in this final, gigantic effort to obtain a favourable decision before it was too late.

The quality of their fighting forces had deteriorated. Largely they consisted now of middle-aged men, of boys

## THE GREAT ATTACK

and of those who had been often wounded or previously discarded as unfit. They therefore decided not to confuse the better with the inferior material, but to divide the two. The bravest and best trained were drafted into separate battalions of storm troops, and, while the less formidable units were put merely to holding the line or to meaner tasks, these storm troops were reserved for great occasions and had now been rapidly collected at the vital points to play their part in the greatest occasion of all. These picked troops were given no limit to their objectives, and their success was to depend upon the speed of their advance. "As regards keeping in touch," they were instructed, "infantry which looks to the right or left soon comes to a stop. Touch with the enemy is the desideratum; a uniform advance must in no case be demanded. The fastest, not the slowest, must set the pace."<sup>1</sup> These were the tactics of infiltration—the hammering into the opposing lines of a series of iron wedges, as a man might drive wedges under the closely nailed-down lid of a wooden packing case until finally its resistance is overcome.

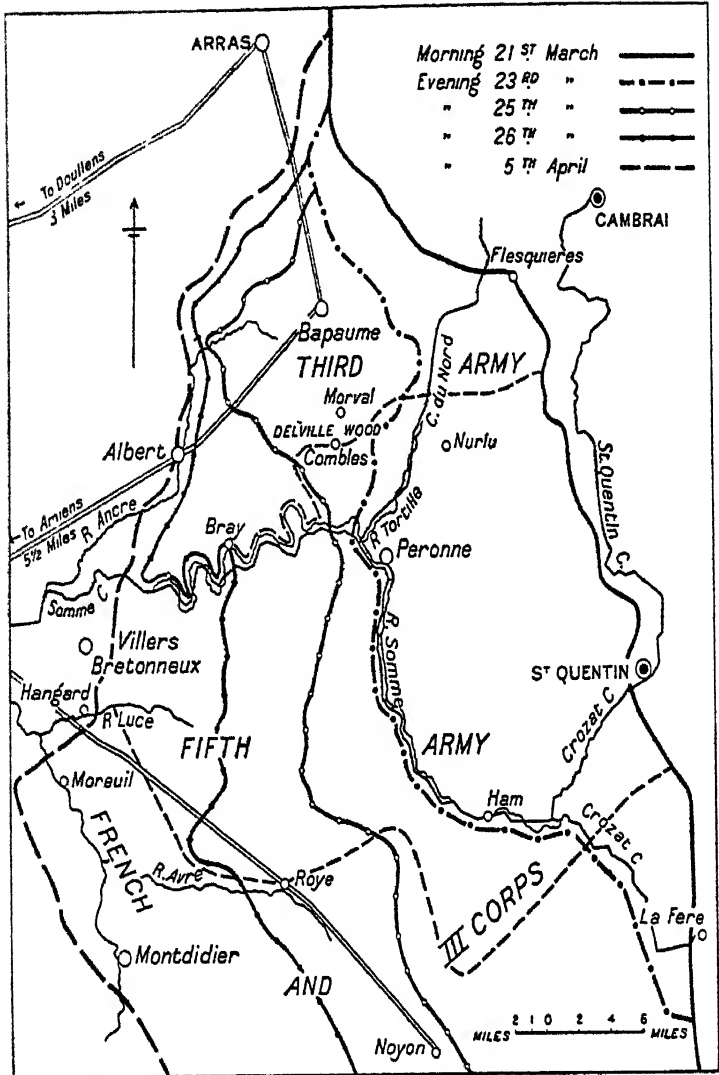
The strategy behind these tactics was to divide the English from the French—according to the traditional policy of Germany, in peace as well as in war. For this reason the spot selected for the attack was that where the two armies met. The first objective was to roll up the extreme right of the British Army. This done, the victorious Germans were to strike not south-west at Paris as in 1914, but north-west at the Channel until the British, cut off from their allies, would be swept into the sea. When that was accomplished, or simultaneously with its accomplishment, the remainder of the German Army would be hurled against the isolated French Army which divided them from the capital.

<sup>1</sup>Quoted in the *Official History, France and Belgium*, 1918, p. 156.



# GERMAN OFFENSIVE

MARCH, 1918



MAP 7

## THE GREAT ATTACK

The tactics were novel and the strategy was sound. The former had been experimented with successfully by General von Hutier at Riga, by Otto von Below at Caporetto and to some extent by von der Marwitz in the counter-attack at Cambrai. These were the three generals who were now in command of the armies playing the principal parts in the offensive. The strategy was Ludendorff's own. Some of his colleagues had urged in preference an attack on the British left through Flanders with the Channel ports as its first objective, and others had favoured a renewal of the assault on Verdun. But the state of the ground in Flanders must have postponed an attack there until the summer, and even if the French were defeated at Verdun the war would not be won so long as the British Army remained intact. In coming to his decision Ludendorff was guided by three main considerations. The troops at his disposal sufficed for *one* great offensive only. This must take place not later than March, before the arrival of the Americans, and thirdly "We must beat the British".<sup>1</sup>

The British lines of defence were constructed on the principle of three zones. The forward zone was held lightly with a view to resisting raids and with the intention of withdrawing from it in the face of a concentrated attack. The battle zone to which withdrawal was to be made would, it was hoped, present an insurmountable obstacle, but if the worse came to the worst there was still behind it the defensive zone, or "green line" as it came to be called, beyond which there must be no retirement.

Once again the weather fought on the German side. An early morning mist, which in some places amounted to dense fog and did not lift until past midday, provided exactly the conditions that were needed for the success of the enemy's tactics. Had they been advancing in line, each

<sup>1</sup>See *Official History*, p. 139.

## THE GREAT ATTACK

unit keeping carefully in touch with its neighbour, the fog would have proved a hindrance and caused delay. But to the system of rapid infiltration fog was of the greatest assistance. Under that dark curtain the attackers could penetrate unmolested almost to the throats of their enemies, and all the advantages that usually belong to the defenders during the first stage of an infantry attack were taken from them. The method of infiltration relied for its success upon the creation of confusion and panic. Fog was most likely to increase both. The British front line, so lightly held with long gaps between small detachments, was penetrated with extreme rapidity. Before those who held it were assured that the enemy had left their trenches, they were already surrounded and found themselves attacked from the rear. As far back as brigade headquarters, while news of the attack was still awaited, the attackers themselves arrived in overwhelming numbers.

Confusion therefore was great, but panic there was none. Telephonic communication had mainly been destroyed by shell fire and what followed became therefore a soldiers' battle. Fighting in the dark, without orders and without knowledge of what was happening, isolated units put up heroic resistance and in many cases died to a man rather than surrender. No troops in the whole history of war ever fought more gallantly than the men of the Third and the Fifth Army.

Haig had anticipated that the enemy would at first make considerable progress, and the events of the first day's fighting caused him no serious disquiet.

"About midday," he wrote, "Byng seemed very anxious because reports showed that the enemy had got Bullecourt and penetrated into the battle zone. But by 2 p.m. he found that the enemy had not got so far as reported at first. By evening Byng had his troops of the VI and IV Corps on

## THE GREAT ATTACK

the rear line of the battle zone and (with my approval) ordered the withdrawal of the V Corps from the Flesquières salient back to the battle zone during the night. This gives us an extra division in reserve."

He also approved of Gough's decision to withdraw from the sector between La Fère and the Somme to the St. Quentin canal.

"Having regard to the great strength of the attack (over 30 divisions having reinforced those holding the original German front line for the battle) and the determined manner in which the attack was everywhere pressed, I consider that the result of the day is highly creditable to British troops. I therefore sent a message of congratulation to the Third and Fifth Armies for communication to all ranks."

On March 22nd fierce fighting continued. The Germans were able to bring fresh troops into the field against the exhausted and depleted forces of the British. Fog once more assisted the enemy, especially on the right of the Fifth Army, who in accordance with plan retired steadily until they reached the line of the Crozat canal and the Somme. "At 6 p.m.", Haig writes, "Gough telephoned 'Parties of all arms of the enemy are through our reserve line'. I concurred in his falling back and defending the line of the Somme and to hold Péronne bridgehead in accordance with his orders. I at once sent to tell General Pétain and asked his support to enable us to hold the line of the Somme and Péronne bridgehead. I expect big attack to develop towards Arras."

Owing to the better visibility in the north, the attack against the Third Army on this day proved much less successful than that against the Fifth and caused acute disappointment to Ludendorff. But none the less Haig considered that the position was growing increasingly serious,



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and on the morning of the 23rd he visited the two army commanders.

"I left about 9.30 a.m., and motored to Albert and had a talk with General Byng commanding Third Army. He reported on the situation. Troops have fought very well indeed. He was anxious about Nurlu, but on the whole was quite satisfied with the situation of his army.

"I then went on to Villers-Bretonneux and saw General Gough commanding Fifth Army. I was surprised to learn that his troops are *now behind* the Somme and the river Tortille. Men very tired after two days' fighting and long march back. On the first day they had to wear gas masks all day, which is very fatiguing, but I cannot make out why the Fifth Army has gone so far back without making some kind of a stand.

"Gough's right (III Corps, Butler) is in touch with the French left opposite Ham. About a company of Germans succeeded in crossing there, but were held up.

"I lunched at my château at Dury, which had been got ready for me as an advanced G.H.Q.

"General Pétain arrived about 4 p.m. He has arranged to put two armies under General Fayolle on my right, to operate in the Somme valley and keep our two armies in touch with one another. Pétain seems most anxious to do all he can to support me and agrees that the only principle which should guide us in our movements is to keep the two armies in touch. In reply to my request to concentrate a large French force (20 divisions) about Amiens, Pétain said he was most anxious to do all he can to support me, but he expected that the enemy is about to attack him in Champagne. Still, he will do his utmost to keep the two armies in touch. If this is lost and the enemy comes in between us, then probably the British will be rounded up and driven into the sea. This must be prevented even

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at the cost of drawing back the north flank on the sea coast.

"I got back to Montreuil at 7 p.m., and had a meeting with Plumer, Horne and their staff officers, along with C.G.S. and Davidson.

"I arranged with Plumer to *thin down* his front; when he has done this I shall be glad to see the divisions thus set free near the Somme. It is most satisfactory to have a commander of Plumer's temperament at a time of crisis like the present.

"The situation seems better to-night, and the French are said to be moving up quickly to support my right."

"*Sunday, 24th March, 1918.* Slight frost last night. Bright sunny day.

"I attended the Church of Scotland at 9.30 a.m. The Rev. Mr. Black of Edinburgh preached an excellent sermon, indicating why we can and should rely on the gospel of Christ to guide us in the present and future.

"The situation this morning was said to be better, but by this afternoon reports arrived in quick succession and showed that the Germans had taken Morval, then Delville wood. The latter report was later said to be untrue. By night the enemy had reached Le Transloy and Combles. North of Le Transloy our troops had hard fighting; the 31st, Guards, 3rd, 40th and 17th Divisions have all repulsed heavy attacks and held their ground.

"On the Somme south of Péronne our troops, in touch with the French, drove back parties of the enemy which had crossed.

"I sent Lawrence to see Gough and the Fifth Army, and fix on some line on which to halt his troops and make a stand. He is also to meet General Fayolle, commanding French Group of Armies on my right, and will arrange for close co-operation.

## THE GREAT ATTACK

"I dined with Byng at Beaurepaire at 8.30 p.m. All at Third Army headquarters are in good heart. I told Byng to *hold on with his left at all costs to the right of the First Army near Arras*, and if forced to give ground, to do so by throwing back his right on to our old trench system from Arras via Ransart and along our old defence line. My intention is to concentrate all reserves I can by thinning my line in the north. With these reserves I hope to strike a vigorous blow southwards if the enemy penetrates to the region of Amiens.

"62 divisions have already been identified in the battle—of these 48 are fresh from reserve. Enemy has still 25 in reserve. At least 12 of these are on the front of our Third and Fifth Armies.

"I went on from Beauquesne to my château at Dury. General Pétain met me there at 11 p.m. General Lawrence accompanied me and Br.-General Clive came from Compiègne with General Pétain. Pétain struck me as very much upset, almost unbalanced and most anxious. I explained my plans as above, and asked him to concentrate as large a force as possible about Amiens astride the Somme to co-operate on my right. He said he expected every moment to be attacked in Champagne, and he did not believe that the main German blow had yet been delivered. He said he would give Fayolle all his available troops. He also told me that he had seen the latter to-day at Montdidier, where the French reserves are now collecting, and had directed him (Fayolle) in the event of the German advance being pressed still further, to fall back south-westwards to Beauvais in order to cover Paris. It was at once clear to me that the effect of this order must be to separate the French from the British right flank, and so allow the enemy to penetrate between the two armies. I at once asked Pétain if he meant to abandon my right flank. He nodded assent, and added,

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'It is the only thing possible, if the enemy compel the Allies to fall back still further.' From my talk with Pétain I gathered that he had recently attended a Cabinet meeting in Paris and that his orders from his Government are to '*cover Paris at all costs*'. On the other hand to keep in touch with the British Army is no longer the basic principle of French strategy. In my opinion, our Army's existence in France depends on keeping the British and French Armies united. So I hurried back to my headquarters at Beaurepaire Château to report the serious change in *French strategy* to the C.I.G.S. and Secretary of State for War, and ask them to come to France."

Slow of speech, deliberate in council, Haig was nevertheless, like all great soldiers, swift to perceive and to appreciate the importance of a fundamental change in the situation and swift to act. Pétain's decision, communicated at that midnight meeting, meant nothing less than the division of the two armies. It might mean the loss of the war. Haig had a high regard for Pétain. He might have attempted to dissuade him from his decision. But he knew his man, and he was also conscious of his own limitations. Pétain's resolution had not been lightly come to, nor were Haig's powers of persuasion in the French language likely to alter it. Time would have been wasted, and time was now more precious than gold. At all costs the two armies must be kept together. Haig's simple and direct brain saw the only way in which it could be accomplished. Let both armies be put under one general, for no general in the world will voluntarily abandon half his force.

"Monday, 25th March, 1918. Glass steady. Fine bright morning, became overcast later.

"I got back from Dury with General Lawrence and Heseltine about 3 a.m.

"Lawrence at once left me to telegraph to Wilson re-

## THE GREAT ATTACK

questing him and Lord Milner to come to France at once in order to arrange that General Foch or some other determined general, who would fight, should be given supreme control of the operations in France. I knew Foch's strategical ideas were in conformity with the orders given me by Lord Kitchener when I became Commander-in-Chief, and that he was a man of great courage and decision as shown during the fighting at Ypres in October and November 1914."

Wilson was not slow to respond to the appeal. He reached Haig's headquarters soon after eleven o'clock the same morning. Haig had not known when he telegraphed that Milner was already in France. His endeavours, therefore, to arrange a meeting for that day, March 25th, at which Lord Milner and the French Prime Minister should be present, proved abortive. He and Wilson drove to Abbeville that afternoon, but of the authorities that they had invited only Weygand arrived, so everything had to be postponed until the morrow. Haig gave Weygand a note for Clemenceau in which he stated briefly "that in order to prevent a serious disaster it is necessary that the French act at once, and concentrate as large a force as possible north of the Somme near Amiens". On this day the British forces were driven farther back along the whole line of battle and the enemy firmly established himself on the southern and western side of the Somme.

Meanwhile a conference was being held at Pétain's headquarters at Compiègne, where owing to the absence of Haig nothing could be settled, except to hold another conference on the morrow which Haig should attend. This was a desperate evening for the Allies, their Armies in full retreat, their Commanders-in-Chief in disagreement and their political leaders wildly telegraphing to one another across the void.

Some uncertainty still exists as to exactly what was pass-

## THE GREAT ATTACK

ing through the mind of Pétain at this critical moment. It has been asserted on good authority that he had mistaken Haig's intentions and believed that the British were determined to retreat in a northerly direction, in which case it was obvious that he could not indefinitely keep in touch with them. It is certain that on the following day Clemenceau informed Milner, when they met at Doullens, that Haig had decided to abandon Amiens, an impression which one minute's conversation between Milner and Haig sufficed to dissipate. Haig had only emphasised the urgent need for French reinforcements in front of Amiens, and from the beginning of the war he had been clear in his own mind that, while the loss of the Channel ports would be a fearful blow to the allied cause, the failure of the two Armies to keep in contact would be a still graver disaster.

Making, therefore, full allowance for the misunderstandings that may arise in moments of crisis owing to the prevalence of rumour, the brevity of messages, the lack of time for consultation and the necessity for swift decisions, it is still difficult to believe that on so simple and so vital a question as that of the direction in which Haig meant to withdraw Pétain had formed any misconception. No line of written evidence has been produced that would have justified it.

The only alternative explanation of Pétain's attitude is that he had reluctantly arrived at the melancholy conclusion that the British Army was defeated. If that were so, his duty was plainly to preserve the French Army at all costs and to defend the capital. At Doullens he expressed these sentiments to Clemenceau, "The Germans will beat the English in the open field, after which they will beat us too." Clemenceau, who hated the mention of the word defeat, transferred his faith from that moment to Foch, who still spoke bravely, if vaguely, of fighting before

## THE GREAT ATTACK

Amiens, in Amiens and behind Amiens, and of not yielding an inch.

March 26th was a cold, bright day and Haig left early for Doullens. At eleven o'clock he held a conference there with Plumer, Horne and Byng, his three army commanders. Gough was not present. He was fully occupied on his own front, nor was he any longer an independent army commander for Haig had placed him and all the British troops south of the Somme under the command of the French General Fayolle.

The Commander-in-Chief briefly outlined the situation. "Our object", he explained, "was to hold on. It was vitally important to cover Amiens, and troops were to be disposed accordingly, but there must not be a break between the First and Third Armies. All available reserves were being sent down to support the Third Army." He then asked the commander of the First Army whether he could spare any more troops to take part in the battle. Horne replied that he could, by taking risks, spare one more Canadian division. Haig decided that the risk must be taken, and greater risks still if the situation of the Third Army again became critical. The opinion of Byng, however, was somewhat reassuring. "In the south near the Somme the enemy is very tired and there is no real fighting taking place there. Friend and foe are, it seems, dead beat and seem to stagger up against each other."

Plumer was then consulted with regard to the general situation. He "said he agreed with the plans made and with the absolute necessity for holding on. He also said that the enemy were obviously milking divisions from the Second Army front, but that he had only seven divisions left to hold his front and did not think he could spare any of them at present."

While Haig and his army commanders were sitting in

## THE GREAT ATTACK

conference the President of the French Republic, his Prime Minister and Milner, representing the British War Cabinet, together with Generals Foch and Wilson, were hastening along the road that leads from Paris to Doullens. Wilson was in the same car as Milner. The night before at Versailles he had put forward the suggestion that Clemenceau should be appointed Generalissimo and that Foch should act as his deputy. The proposal met with approval nowhere save in the over-subtle mind of its author. That he should have made it is the more remarkable in view of the fact that having paused at G.H.Q. on his way to Versailles he must have been already aware that Haig was in favour of the simpler solution, namely the appointment of Foch to the supreme command. In any case, Wilson had by now abandoned his first idea and during the drive from Paris he strongly advocated to Milner the proposal of Haig without, however, so it seems, making it plain that Haig himself would support it.

The meeting in the little square at Doullens was dramatic. No conference of plenipotentiaries throughout the war took place so near to the firing line. Shells were falling in the vicinity and troops with the marks of battle upon them were marching continually through the town.

While Haig was still in conference with his generals, motor cars bearing the men upon whom so much now depended kept dashing up the narrow street and halting before the small Hôtel de Ville. Poincaré and Clemenceau were the first to arrive, then Foch, then Pétain and lastly Milner and Wilson. As Haig came down the steps to meet them observers noticed that his face was tired and anxious.

During the greetings that followed Clemenceau informed Milner of the rumour that had reached him with regard to Haig's intention of abandoning Amiens. It therefore seemed best to Milner to hold a preliminary confer-



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ence with the British generals, who in a very few minutes reassured him as to their determination to hold on. There followed a short private conversation with Haig which further enlightened him, for he was still in doubt as to the attitude that Haig would adopt towards the proposal to appoint Foch Generalissimo. Very few words sufficed to make this plain. Haig had refused to detach divisions that he could not spare to form part of a General Reserve under the control of a committee, but he was willing and eager at this crisis to place himself and all his forces under the command of a fighting general. "I can deal with a man," he said, "but not with a committee."

The historic conference took place soon after midday, and the following is the brief account of it that Haig wrote in his diary.

"We discussed the situation, and it was decided that *Amiens must be covered at all costs*. French troops, we are told, are being hurried up as rapidly as possible. I have ordered Gough to hold on with his left at Bray. It was proposed by Clemenceau that Foch should be appointed to co-ordinate the operations of an allied force to cover Amiens and ensure that the French and British flanks remained united. This proposal seemed to me quite worthless, as Foch would be in a subordinate position to Pétain and myself. In my opinion it was essential to success that Foch should control Pétain, so I at once recommended that Foch should *co-ordinate the action of all the allied armies on the western front*. Both Governments agreed to this. Foch has chosen Dury for his headquarters (3 miles south of Amiens). Foch seemed sound and sensible but Pétain had a terrible look. He had the appearance of a commander who has lost his nerve.

"I lunched from the lunch box at Doullens, then motored back to Beaurepaire.

## THE GREAT ATTACK

"I rode about 5 p.m.—as I was going out I met Milner and Wilson. They spoke to me about Gough. I said that whatever the opinion at home might be, and no matter what Foch might have said, I considered that he (Gough) had dealt with a most difficult situation very well. He had never lost his head, was always cheery and fought hard."

Wilson also recounts in his diary this brief encounter. "I saw Douglas Haig just going out for a ride and he told me he was greatly pleased with the new arrangements. . . . Douglas Haig is ten years younger to-night than he was yesterday afternoon." The causes of his rejuvenation were that his plan had been adopted, that a great weight of responsibility had been lifted from his shoulders and that he felt confidence in his new commander.

When many minds are travelling in the same direction and ultimately arrive at one conclusion, genuine doubt must always exist as to when, where and with whom the idea originated. It was so with the invention of the tanks, and it is so with the appointment of the Generalissimo. It has been seen that Haig was opposed to such an appointment earlier in the war, and reasons have been given for believing that he was right to oppose it. It has been seen also that he resented the temporary appointment of Nivelle, and the facts have shown that that appointment was a mistake. That Lloyd George had worked for greater unity of direction in his negotiations with Painlevé and by the setting up of the Council at Versailles, has been admitted, but he had subsequently, in November, expressly dissociated himself from the proposal to appoint a supreme commander. Nor had Milner any authority to go back upon that very definite declaration. It is to Milner's credit that he took upon himself the responsibility of committing the British Government to so important a step which was endorsed by the War Cabinet two days later.

## THE GREAT ATTACK

But wherever the idea originated, and many people had long been thinking of it, it can hardly be denied that its realisation at that time and in that way was due more to Haig than to any individual. From the night when, having grasped the intentions of Pétain, he telegraphed to London for Milner and Wilson, to the last moment of the Doullens conference when he corrected the first draft of Clemenceau and gave to Foch the full powers he needed, there had been only one definite plan in his mind, and it was because he had been able to put that plan into action that he looked ten years younger when Henry Wilson met him riding out from the Château of Beaurepaire.

Satisfied as he was with that day's work Haig would have been the last to exaggerate its importance. In suggesting that Foch should be given supreme command he had had one definite object in view, to prevent the withdrawal of the French in a south-westerly direction on Paris and the separation of the two armies. That was the immediate danger which the policy of Pétain, communicated to Haig on the night of March 24th at Dury, had revealed. That danger had been averted by the appointment of Foch, but that appointment had not sufficed to win the war or even to stave off defeat in the battle that was still raging.

Nobody knew this better than Foch. He, the intrepid apostle of victory, in the hour of his triumph at Doullens allowed to escape him the only words of pessimism which history has to his record. At luncheon after the conference Clemenceau, who never liked him, rather bitterly congratulated him on having at last obtained what he had always desired. "A fine gift," was Foch's retort; "you give me a lost battle and tell me to win it."

It seemed indeed during the days and weeks that followed that this statement was hardly an exaggeration. March 27th was another day of hard fighting when the

## THE GREAT ATTACK

exhausted remains of the Fifth Army were almost surrounded owing to the right of the Third Army having uncovered their flank and allowed the enemy to cross the Somme in their rear.

On the following morning the Germans delivered, with terrific energy and fresh troops, a new attack in another part of the line. The objective was Arras and the brunt of the attack was borne by the Third and the First Armies. On this day the enemy's most formidable ally failed him. There was no fog. The result was that after having gained a few yards at the price of fearful casualties the attack failed, Arras was saved, and, so far as this particular stage of the long battle was concerned, the worst was over. The credit was principally due to Horne and the men of the First Army, who fought in blissful ignorance of the fact that the great principle of unity of command had been established and that Foch was the Generalissimo.

On March 29th the King, prompted by his unflinching instinct for making the right gesture in every public emergency, arrived at the headquarters of his Commander-in-Chief. In the account that Haig gave him of recent happenings he laid stress on three outstanding facts. First that the British infantry in France were less numerous by 100,000 than they had been a year before; secondly that they were now opposed by three times as many Germans as they had had against them then; and thirdly that they had been compelled to extend the length of their line by at least one-fifth of the front they had held in the previous autumn.

That same day Haig met Foch at Abbeville. The Generalissimo arrived "about twenty minutes late as usual, and full of apologies. He tells me that he is doing all he can to expedite the arrival of French divisions, and until they come we can only do our best to hold on to our present

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positions. It is most important to prevent the enemy from placing guns near enough to shell the great railway depot and troops sidings near Amiens (Longueau)—on the east of the town. By the 2nd April I gather that the French should have sufficient troops concentrated to admit of their starting an offensive. But will they ?

“I think Foch has brought great energy to bear on the present situation, and has, instead of permitting French troops to retire south-west from Amiens, insisted on some of them relieving our tired troops and on covering Amiens at all costs. He and I are quite in agreement as to the general plan of operations.”

Haig has been often unjustly accused of failing to maintain friendly relations with his French allies, and it is true that he was by temperament a man who did not easily co-operate with foreigners. The greater credit is therefore due to him for the fact that at this crisis, and henceforward among the many difficulties that still divided the Allies from victory, such satisfactory relations existed between the British Commander-in-Chief and the French Generalissimo, and that although no love was lost between the French Generalissimo and his own Prime Minister, Haig succeeded in remaining on good terms with both.

On the day after his meeting with Foch at Abbeville he met Clemenceau at Dury. “Clemenceau is in full accord with me and gave orders for the French to support us energetically and cross the Avre river so as to hold the high ground where the Canadian cavalry now is. I sincerely hope that Clemenceau will get his order carried out. Clemenceau spoke most freely about Foch’s position. He had no fears about my loyally doing my best to co-operate. It was Pétain and Foch who, he feared, would squabble. ‘Pétain’, he said, ‘is a very nervous man, and sometimes may not carry out all he has promised.’ Per-

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sonally, I have found Pétain anxious to help and straightforward, but in the present operations he has been slow to decide and slower still in acting. At times his nerve seems to have gone—and he imagines that he is to be attacked in force. Hence the troubled position of affairs about Amiens.”

Haig said afterwards that during these early days of the new system it was Clemenceau who really played the Generalissimo's part. Curiously unforeseen in their developments are the most carefully constructed of men's devices. Wilson had thought to make Clemenceau the figurehead, giving to Foch the real executive power. And now it appeared that exactly the opposite, a proposition which nobody would ever have put forward, had been accomplished.

Haig's diary for the 1st of April certainly supports this view. "I left Beaurepaire about 11 a.m. and motored to Dury, where I met M. Clemenceau. I again pointed out the importance of the Villers-Bretonneux position, not only for covering my right flank, but also Amiens and the French left. In order to enable me to hold that position, the French must take over the front from Moreuil to the village of Hangard. This sector includes the defence of the Luce valley.

"Clemenceau said we must get Foch and settle the point at once between us, so Foch was telephoned for. He was at Beauvais and left at 1.30 p.m. for Dury. Meantime M. Clemenceau lunched with me in the house I have at Dury from the lunch box. The party was Heseltine, Clemenceau and myself. Clemenceau presented me with a huge package of chocolate, quite 40 lb. in weight, from Marquis, of Paris. This was the result of our talk over our last lunch, when I said owing to the French Government limiting the price of chocolate to 2 fr. 50 cm. per lb., only chocolate of inferior quality was now made. And Marquis chocolate

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at 12 fr. 50 cm. was not to be bought. Hence Clemenceau brought me this great present to-day. In reply to my asking how he had got it, he said he had sent the Commissaire of Police to obtain the 'best quality' for me in Marquis's shop.

"Foch arrived about 3 p.m., and after a few words to him privately by Clemenceau, and an explanation from me of my wishes, Foch quickly put his name to a document ordering General Fayolle to take over the line I wanted. Half to be taken over to-night, and half to-morrow night. Rawlinson, Davidson, General Weygand and Barescut also present at our meeting."

Two days later a conference took place at Beauvais which Haig, together with Lloyd George and Wilson, attended. Clemenceau, Foch and Pétain were there. "M. Clemenceau proposed to modify the agreement come to at Doullens, which gave Foch authority to 'co-ordinate the action of *all* allied armies on the western front'. After considerable discussion, it was agreed to entrust to Foch 'the strategical direction of military operations. The Commanders-in-Chief of the British, French and American Armies will each have full control of the tactical action of his respective army. Each Commander-in-Chief will have the right of appeal to his Government, if in his opinion his army is endangered by reason of any order received from General Foch.'

"I was in full agreement and explained that this new arrangement did not in any way alter my attitude towards Foch, or the Commander-in-Chief of the French Army. I had always, in accordance with Lord Kitchener's orders to me, regarded the latter as being responsible for indicating *the general strategical policy* and, as far as possible, I tried to fall in with his strategical plan of operations.

"Before the meeting broke up, I asked the Governments to state that it is their desire that a French offensive should

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be started *as soon as possible* in order to attract the enemy's reserves and so prevent him from continuing his pressure against the British. Foch and Pétain both stated their determination to start attacking '*as soon as possible.*' But will they ever attack? I doubt whether the French Army as a whole is now fit for an offensive."

With tactical control of his army, and with right of appeal to his own Government, Haig held now very much the same position with regard to Foch as he had formerly held with regard to Nivelle. In practice, as the sequel will show, there proved to be little difference in his relations with Foch from his previous relations with Joffre and Pétain. From the very beginning of the war he had plainly understood that in all matters of strategy the final decision must rest with the French, and he had loyally attempted to fall in with their views except when he believed that the safety of his own troops was endangered. Henceforward he continued to maintain the same attitude. Much exaggerated are the claims that have been put forward on behalf of the principle of unity of command. That its adoption on March 26th, 1918, saved the cause, as Haig had foreseen that it would, may be admitted, but it would be difficult to point to any subsequent occasion during the next eight months when it seriously affected the conduct of the war.

The result of the conference at Beauvais on April 3rd was apparently the opposite to what had been intended. Clemenceau, according to Henry Wilson's diary, had called the conference in order to strengthen Foch's position "principally to allow him to coerce Pétain, and not Haig who is working smoothly".<sup>1</sup> The actual result, as Wilson saw, was to weaken Foch's position rather than to strengthen it.

<sup>1</sup>*Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson*, by Major-General Sir C. E. Callwell, vol. ii, p. 86.



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Haig drove part of the way from Montreuil to Beauvais that day with Lloyd George, whom he found "a fatiguing companion in a motor. He talks and argues so". Nor was the principal subject of conversation an agreeable one. It concerned the future of General Gough.

"I gathered that Lloyd George expects to be attacked in the House of Commons for not tackling the man-power problem before, also for personally ordering divisions to the east at a critical time against the advice of his military adviser, viz. the C.I.G.S. (Robertson). He is looking out for a scapegoat for the retreat of the Fifth Army. I pointed out that 'fewer men, extended front and increased hostile forces' were the main causes to which the retreat may be attributed. He was much down upon Gough. I championed the latter's cause. 'He had few reserves, a very big front entirely without defensive works recently taken over from the French and the weight of the enemy's attack fell on him', I said. Also that in spite of a most difficult situation he had never really lost his head. Lloyd George said he had not held the Somme bridges, nor destroyed them, and that Gough must not be employed. To this I said I could not condemn an officer unheard, and that if Lloyd George wishes him suspended he must send me an order to that effect."

Now it must be admitted that grave doubts with regard to Gough's competence as an army commander had existed before March 21st and had not been confined to civilian circles. They had been brought to Haig's notice both officially and unofficially. Lord Derby as Secretary of State had written to him more than once on the subject, and divisional commanders had expressed their reluctance to serve with the Fifth Army. There are no scales for weighing the qualities of generals. Contemporaries are inclined to rely upon rumour, and historians can only judge

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by performance, paying at the same time due respect to the recorded opinion of accredited contemporaries. In the conduct of this great battle, from March 21st to March 28th, it is impossible to prove that Gough, fighting against tremendous odds, made a single mistake. Had he retreated less rapidly his whole force might have been annihilated, the link between the French and British Armies would have been broken and the object of the enemy would have been achieved.

A despot can behave magnanimously in the hour of defeat. After Blenheim Louis XIV addressed not a word of reproach to Tallard. But magnanimity is not among the many virtues that belong to popular government. Democracy demands its victims. There had been a spectacular retreat, there had been terrible casualties, there had been days of the gravest anxiety, and the general who seemed to be responsible was the very one against whom whispers had already been percolating the masses. Fiercely the cry went up for his head on a charger, and the Prime Minister was only too willing to make such an offering to public opinion, especially if it was likely to prevent a demand for more.

Haig took a different view. In his mind popular opinion counted for nothing against the demands of justice. He had thought it wise after the conference of Doullens to replace Gough by Rawlinson in command of the Fifth, or as it was henceforth called, the Fourth Army, because he knew that Foch, who had been personally rude to Gough, thought that he was to blame. But Gough was still in France, and Haig would condemn no officer unheard. On the day after his conversation with the Prime Minister, however, he received a telegram from the Secretary of State for War conveying the decision of the War Cabinet that Gough should return home at once. Haig could only

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bow to that decision. He naturally supposed, as he told Gough before they parted, that an enquiry would be held. He did not believe that such a gallant officer with so fine a record would be disgraced without being allowed to say a word in his own defence or to produce one out of a cloud of witnesses. He should perhaps have anticipated that the Government would not dare to institute an enquiry which might so easily have ended by the prosecutor finding himself in the dock.

After two more days of fierce fighting, the 4th and 5th of April, the attack upon this particular section of the front died away. From the enemy's point of view it had accomplished much, but it had failed in its main objective. The Allies' front had been driven back for many miles but the line was still unbroken, the Channel ports had not changed hands and Paris was preserved.

Haig knew that the battle was not yet over. He alone had fully appreciated that this must be Germany's final effort, and he was therefore convinced that it would not be abandoned after a fortnight. Once again his military instinct, guided by his admirable Intelligence Service, led him to form a fairly accurate forecast of the direction in which the next blow was to be delivered. On April 6th he wrote in his diary, "The enemy's intentions seem still to be the capture of the Vimy position by turning it on both flanks by mass attacks on the south of Arras as well as on the north, south of the La Bassée canal. At the same time a surprise attack by three or four divisions against the Portuguese front is also to be expected. The First Army is quite alive to these possibilities and is prepared to meet them."

That evening he wrote to Foch, "All information points to the enemy's intention to continue his efforts to destroy the British Army. . . . In view of this threatening situation,

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I submit that one of the three following courses should be given effect to without delay, viz.—either

1. A vigorous offensive in the next five or six days by the French armies on a considerable scale,

or

2. The French to relieve the British troops south of the Somme (a total of 4 divisions),

or

3. A group of 4 French divisions to be located in the neighbourhood of St. Pol as a reserve to the British front.”

He concluded his letter by asking Foch to meet him on the following day, which Foch agreed to do, and the meeting accordingly took place at Aumale on April 7th.

Haig began by stating his reasons for believing that the next German attack would be delivered further north on the British front.

“Foch quite agreed that the British must be prepared for a very heavy attack. His plan was first to block the door to Amiens. To this end the French were going to attack from Moreuil southwards, and he wished the British Fourth Army to co-operate. I pointed out the very limited means at Rawlinson’s disposal. When the door to Amiens was barred, then he (Foch) would consider the advisability of putting in a large attack from the south towards Roye. Personally, I do not believe that either Foch or Pétain has any intention of putting French divisions into the battle.

“As regards my requests for either taking over British front south of the Somme, or placing a French reserve near St. Pol, Foch said he was unable to do either; but he had ordered a reserve of four divisions and three cavalry divisions of the French army to be located south-west of Amiens (i.e. in a very safe place).

“This was, he said, the best that he could do at present, and he thought that the presence of the French reserves

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near Amiens would enable me to move my own reserves from the right flank if the battle required them further north. I wired to the C.I.G.S. result of my meeting with Foch, and suggested that he (Wilson) should come out to discuss the situation, and try to get better arrangements from Foch."

On the following day a German aviator captured by the French gave the valuable information that the mass of the German reserves were in the Tournai-Douai-Cambrai area. On learning this Haig realised that the attack was likely to come further north than he had at first anticipated. He immediately sent for General de Laguiche, the head of the French mission, "and asked him to request General Foch to arrange to relieve six British divisions in the Ypres sector, i.e. as far south as the Ypres-Comines canal. This would enable me to form an effective reserve on my left." Later in the day General Weygand arrived at G.H.Q. to explain that Foch was unable to agree to this proposal.

Henry Wilson arrived early next morning, but did not prove an effective ally to Haig in his efforts to persuade Foch. Wilson did not approve of Haig's suggestion that French troops should be sent to the Ypres sector because he still failed to appreciate the likelihood of the attack being delivered in the north. Yet even while they were talking the blow had fallen.

It was on the north, not on the south, of the La Bassée canal that the attack was delivered, and the weight of it fell upon the Portuguese troops as Haig had foreseen. The discipline of the Portuguese had lately given cause for anxiety. Of the two divisions one had already been relieved, and it had been arranged that the relief of the other should take place on the following night. But the attack came too soon, the Portuguese were unable to meet it, and although the divisions on either side formed defensive flanks a huge

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gap was created which there were no troops immediately available to fill. It would require a volume to recount in detail the events of that disastrous day and of the two that followed. The Germans were attacking with two armies, one under General Sixte von Arnim, who commanded from the sea to the river Lys, and the other under General von Quast, who covered the area from the Lys to the La Bassée canal. Opposite to them respectively were the Second Army under Plumer and the First Army under Horne. It must not, however, be supposed, because the Second and First Armies had played a secondary part in the previous battle, that therefore the troops which now composed them were fresh and undepleted. Divisions were continually being moved from one army to another, and many of those which had experienced the worst of the fighting on the Somme had been sent further north to rest and recover, only to find themselves once more in the centre of the battle area. The British Army in France now consisted of fifty-eight divisions, of which forty-six had already been engaged between March 21st and April 7th. Nor were there any reserves in the vicinity. A few French divisions at Ypres or at St. Pol would have been invaluable. But once again the battle-weary British Army had to bear unaided the full weight of the attack. Once again Haig's warnings had been disregarded and his demand for reinforcements denied.

The retreat which began on the 9th was continued on the 10th, and it seemed doubtful whether the First or the Second Army was in the more desperate position. At 9 a.m. that morning Haig wrote, "General Horne has gone to see Plumer regarding placing reserves at his disposal. Yesterday we had drawn on Plumer to help Horne. Now we are strengthening Plumer by moving reserve divisions from First Army to the left and replacing them from Third Army.

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“The Fourth Army (Rawlinson) has been told that, in view of the development of the enemy’s attacks in the north, no troops will be available for his proposed offensive except the 5th Australian Brigade to cover the French left near Hangard village. I also order Cavalry Corps less one division to be moved to the St. Pol-Doullens area in G.H.Q. Reserve.

“Cox reported that the German attack north of the La Bassée canal was made on an eleven-mile front by eight divisions in front line and two in reserve.

“At 11.30 a.m. I wrote to General Foch, called his attention to the situation north of the La Bassée canal and in process of development north of Armentières. I requested him to arrange to take over *some portion* of the British line in order to set free reserves and enable me to continue the battle and hold our positions.”

At midday Haig wrote to Foch as follows:

“General Headquarters,  
British Armies in France.  
Wednesday, 10th April, 1918.

Noon.

“Dear General Foch,

You will by this time have been informed of the results of the enemy’s attack yesterday north of the La Bassée canal. This morning he has extended his attack north of Armentières as far as Messines.

“These facts still further confirm me in the opinion which I expressed to you yesterday, viz. that your plan of placing the heads of 4 French divisions on the Somme, immediately west of Amiens, does not adequately meet the military situation of the British Army.

“The enemy will without a doubt continue to strike against my troops until they are exhausted. It is therefore vitally important, in order to enable us to continue the

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battle for a prolonged period, that the French Army should take immediate steps to relieve *some part* of the British front, and take an active share in the battle.

“As to what portion of our front should be taken over by the French, I leave you to decide. But I must emphasise my opinion that the military situation is such that an immediate decision and action, on the lines which I have suggested above, is necessary in the combined interest of the allied armies.

Yours very truly,

D. Haig.”

At ten o'clock that night Foch arrived at G.H.Q. He said that he had carefully considered Haig's letter and that he had at last agreed that the enemy's objective was the British Army. He had therefore decided to move up a large force of French troops so that they would be in readiness to take part in the battle. Plans were at once drawn up and orders issued for the head of a French force to cross the Somme west of Amiens and to reach the lines Molliens-au-Bois-Vigniecourt on the 12th and Vauchelles-Doullens on the 13th. The force was to consist of four infantry and three cavalry divisions. The intention was that as the French force advanced the British reserves would be moved further north.

Haig was thankful that Foch was at last alive as to where the real danger lay; but still his assistance was slow in coming and the next day, April 11th, seemed the most critical of all. Haig visited Plumer in the afternoon and was impressed by his urgent need of reinforcements. Always two major considerations were present to Haig's mind, two spectres that walked with him by day, and might have haunted a weaker man by night. On his left hand loomed the danger of the loss of the Channel ports, on his right hand stalked the menace of a breach between his army and



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the French. They stood, these phantoms, at the extreme ends of the long line he had to defend, and both beckoned him to send his meagre reserves in their direction.

Something of his anxiety may be gauged from what he wrote in his diary that night:

“On leaving Plumer I motored straight back to Montreuil and saw Lawrence, Davidson and Cox regarding the necessity of sending Plumer more reserves. It seems to me that the enemy will do his utmost to exploit his success towards Hazebrouck and Calais. So it is very necessary to give Plumer sufficient troops to hold up the enemy's advance. On the other hand, I have only the 1st Australian and 4th Canadian Divisions, which have not been heavily engaged; so my reserves are very few indeed.

“The most important thing is to keep connection with the French. With this object in view I must be strong at and south of Arras.

“I must also cover Calais and Boulogne. I cannot spare another division to-day, but when the French advance north from the Somme to-morrow I might let the 57th Division go north to Plumer.

“In view of the possibility of the enemy's advancing on Hazebrouck, and my shortage of reserves, I write to Foch asking him to concentrate a force of *at least* four French divisions between St. Omer and Dunkirk in readiness to support the British. I send my letter by Davidson, who will explain the situation of our troops to Foch. The latter says to hold our front and try to form a pocket round the area where the enemy has broken through. This is already being done by us. Foch is to send a French Cavalry Corps to Cassel to support Plumer. It will be at Hesdin to-morrow night. *We must expect the enemy to press his attacks to the Calais-Boulogne coast*, and I am still anxious to have French support about Cassel, since Foch refuses stoutly to take over

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any line from us, and so set free British divisions for this purpose."

It was that same night, although he does not mention it in his diary, that he wrote an order to the troops which will not be easily forgotten.

"To all Ranks of the British Forces in France.

"Three weeks ago to-day the Enemy began his terrific attacks against us on a 50-mile front. His objects are to separate us from the French, to take the Channel ports and destroy the British Army.

"In spite of throwing already 106 divisions into the battle and enduring the most reckless sacrifice of human life, he has as yet made little progress towards his goals.

"We owe this to the determined fighting and self-sacrifice of our troops. Words fail me to express the admiration which I feel for the splendid resistance offered by all ranks of our Army under the most trying circumstances.

"Many amongst us now are tired. To those I would say that victory will belong to the side which holds out the longest. The French Army is moving rapidly and in great force to our support.

"There is no other course open to us but to fight it out! Every position must be held to the last man: there must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall, and believing in the justice of our cause, each one of us must fight on to the end. The safety of our homes and the freedom of mankind alike depend on the conduct of each one of us at this critical moment.

D. Haig,  
F.M."

The next morning, April 12th, Haig set out early. Although there was nothing tangible that could be pointed to as constituting an improvement in the situation, already there seemed to be a new spirit of optimism abroad.

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"I left soon after 10 a.m. and motored to Hesdin, where I had a talk with General Byng (Third Army). He expects to be attacked shortly, but says all are confident of beating back the enemy and are in good heart.

"I reached Doullens at noon, and spent three-quarters of an hour with M. Clemenceau in his train. M. Loucheur was present. Clemenceau was anxious about our covering the Bruay coalmines effectively. He had seen Horne this morning, and had formed the opinion that the British were going back at once to the La Bassée canal. There are only five days reserve of coal now at the French munition factories and, as 70 per cent. of their coal comes from the Bruay district, it is of very great importance to cover the mines as long as possible. I assured him on this point.

"I next pointed out the urgent necessity of the French reinforcing the British, and of getting the latter on to a shorter line *in order to be able to continue the battle*. My troops are fast getting worn out. I urged that three measures should be taken at once :

- "(1) Hasten move of French divisions by road from the Somme on Doullens, etc.
- "(2) Inundate the Dunkirk area.
- "(3) Send troops (French and *American*) to the St. Omer-Dunkirk line to support our Second Army.

"Clemenceau left by train to visit Foch and is to press my points. He told me that I could depend on him to support me, even though the French army holds from Amiens to Switzerland. To this I replied that *the decisive point* is the front occupied by the British army, and it is of the greatest importance to the allied cause to preserve the British forces in the field and *keep the war going*.

"Clemenceau was most friendly and said he always looked forward to a talk with me.

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FACSIMILE OF HAIG'S SPECIAL ORDER OF  
THE DAY, IN HIS OWN HANDWRITING,

12 APRIL 1918

*Imperial War Museum photograph. Copyright Reserved*

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"I then visited headquarters IV Corps at Marieux and saw General Harper and his staff.

"I lunched by the roadside near Talmas and reached headquarters Australian Corps at Villers Bocage about 2.30 p.m. and saw the M.G.G.S. (General White). Thence I went to headquarters V Corps at Naours and saw General Fanshawe, General Boyd, his C.R.A. (Benson) and others.

"I was greatly struck with the fine spirit of confidence and cheerfulness which existed everywhere.

"All spoke of their present positions being very good and strong, and their ability to hold them against any kind of attack which the enemy is capable of making. I was told many stories of what happened during the retreat. White of the Australians is a fine cheery fellow, and assured me that the Australians would do their best for me. They might lose a little ground here and there, but *all* meant fighting. At every corps headquarters everyone I met expressed disgust with Lloyd George's recent speech (which I have not read) which they stated contained untrue statements of our fighting strength in France. Harper stated that his present front is on a circle and so envelops the enemy to a great extent; in this salient the enemy has lost enormously, especially about Serre on the 5th April, when our gunners fired at great masses of the enemy without being interfered with at all by hostile artillery fire.

"It gave me a great feeling of confidence to find the commanders and staffs so fit and cheery after the recent trying times, and so confident.

"I returned via Auxi-le-Château to St. André (headquarters Flying Corps). I had a talk with Generals Salmond and Festing and heard of the satisfactory results of to-day's work in the air. I also rang Davidson up on the telephone. He said Plumer was anxious about the situation at Bailleul. The enemy was attacking north-west, but seemed to be

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held by our troops opposite Merville. I rode back to Beau-repaire and had a talk with Lawrence and Davidson before dinner. *I said my policy is the same. Keep touch with the French on the right at all costs.* Therefore we cannot reduce any more of our reserves from Arras to Amiens. Plumer must keep in touch with First Army at all costs. If the French send troops to Cassel he may be able to hold on to Pilkem line for a time but, in view of the enemy's very large available reserves, he should be prepared to withdraw slowly to the line in front of Dunkirk (Hondschoote) and thence to Forêt de Nieppe. Inundations must be made in the north at once.

"Lawrence went off at 8.30 p.m. to see Plumer."

Towards the end of this eventful week—Saturday was the 14th—the position of the British Army showed some slight improvement, although the assaults of the enemy were still continuing, ground was still being lost, and assistance from the French was still long in materialising. On that Saturday a conference took place at Abbeville which both Milner and Foch attended. The latter was accompanied by General Du Cane, who had recently been appointed to act as liaison officer between him and G.H.Q. The appointment of so senior an officer to this post—Du Cane was a lieutenant-general—had been Wilson's idea, who had not troubled to enquire whether Du Cane spoke French, in which language he was not, in fact, particularly proficient, and he was compelled for some time to make use of an interpreter. Foch was inclined to resent the appointment, and Du Cane found it at first as difficult to fathom Foch's mentality as it was to understand his language. But, as the two men came to know one another better, mutual understanding and appreciation increased, and the presence of Du Cane at Foch's headquarters was to prove of great value to the allied cause.

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At this conference at Abbeville, Foch was at his most abrupt and least comprehensible. To Haig's urgent requests for reliefs on account of the tiredness of his troops he would reply that there must be no relief during a battle; and to the suggestion that the line might be shortened by a withdrawal on the left he answered monotonously that there must be no withdrawal. When he was pressed to send as many troops as he could to the Hazebrouck-Cassel area, he said that he would see what the situation was when the movement of troops then in progress was finished. The fact of the matter was that Foch believed this particular offensive was slackening and that he was determined to economise his reserves, and to retain them so far as possible in a position where they would be readily available wherever the next blow fell.

There had existed for some time a school of thought, more prominent in Paris than elsewhere, that was in favour of a complete amalgamation of the two armies, the French and the English, into one. Such a decision would have rendered the existence of a British commander-in-chief superfluous, and the British Government would have ceased to exercise any control over the direction of the campaign, save such as could be brought to bear by diplomatic pressure.

Haig had always condemned the proposal and was always on his guard against any suggestion which seemed to have a tendency in that direction.

On April 19th he wrote:

"After lunch Commandant Gemeau brought me a letter from Foch stating that he was anxious to maintain 15 French divisions in reserve behind the British Army. To enable him to obtain these divisions it would be necessary to put tired British divisions in the positions now held by the French divisions which he wants.



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"I at once replied that I would do anything necessary to help to win the battle, but it was desirable to tell Foch that any idea of a permanent 'amalgam' must be dismissed from his mind at once, because that would never work. I also reminded Gemeau of the proposals made at the Calais conference in February 1917, by which the British G.H.Q. was to disappear. He assured me that I could implicitly depend on Foch's good faith. So I told Gemeau I would send a favourable reply and have the question studied at once.

"Lord Milner arrived about 3 p.m. on his way to London to take up his duties as Secretary of State for War. He expressed his intention of doing his best to guard the interests of the Army, and he hoped that the Army would treat him in a kindly spirit.

"I showed him Foch's letter. He agreed that it was necessary to meet his request, but only as a temporary measure. He was entirely opposed to mixing up units of the French and British. The needs of this great battle had made intermingling of units for a time necessary, but he would never approve of a permanent 'amalgam'."

Lord Milner had been appointed to the War Office in succession to Lord Derby, who was taking over the post of British Ambassador in Paris. Haig regretted the change. There had been from the first no rift in his harmonious relations with Derby, to whom he telegraphed on this occasion: "We shall miss you very much at the War Office but feel convinced you will be of great assistance to the Army in your new post."

After his conversation with Milner recounted above, Haig wrote to Foch and undertook to send the four divisions which had been asked for. When he had done so, and the letter had been despatched, he received an excited telegram from the War Office, who had been informed of the proposal by the British liaison officer at Foch's head-

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quarters. The War Office had realised, as had Haig, the possibilities which such a suggestion might involve. "As this would eventually result in the complete intermixture of French and British armies", so ran the telegram, "destruction of identity of British Army, and is contrary to instructions contained in first five lines of paragraph 3 of Lord Kitchener's memorandum No. 121/7711 December 28th, 1915 to you which has not been altered by the recent arrangements for command of allied forces on the main front, I presume that you are refusing."

Haig's reply was brief—"Your telegram 56739. I explained proposal to Lord Milner yesterday. I consider military situation requires me to meet Foch's wishes to a limited degree. Am writing."

There was a certain irony in the situation. Within a month of the introduction of unity of command, for which the authorities at home had endeavoured to secure the credit, those same authorities are found telegraphing to Haig "presuming" that he has refused to obey the wishes of the Generalissimo, and referring him back to the original instructions of Kitchener; while Haig replies that he has decided to comply with the request of Foch for precisely the same reasons and in precisely the same manner as he had always complied with the requests of Joffre, of Nivelle and of Pétain.

Brains are generally required in order to raise a man to high position, but, when that position has been attained character, or that which for want of a better word we call 'character', is of greater importance. The mind of a very clever man may often be distracted from the main issue by the consideration of a subsidiary problem. The following correspondence which took place between Wilson and Haig at this time illustrates the essentially different qualities of the two men.

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“*War Office.*

“21.4.18.

“My General,

I have been thinking over the future and give you the benefit of my thoughts on one of the subjects pondered.

“I think your Chief Engineer ought to be a bigger man. It seems to me that when all Boche attacks are driven off we shall settle down to siege war again, and again we shall want to make our lines so strong that we can hold them lightly and rest and train our troops. To do this we want engineers of the very highest order, we want irrigation or inundation engineers, Panama Canal engineers, mining engineers, railway engineers, etc. And above them all to direct your policy, and of course under Lawrence, we want a really great Military Engineer, who, with the assistance of his experts, will be years ahead of the Boches.

“In fact and in short we want to do, and I am sure we can do, for engineering what you have already done (with Geddes) for railways and transportation.

“Don't you think so?

Henry.”

“General Headquarters,  
British Armies in France.

“Dear C.I.G.S.

“24. Ap. 18.

“Yours of 21st re my Chief Engineer.

“He *has* done well!

“There is no difficulty in making designs and plans for engineering works—the whole difficulty is lack of *labour* to execute the plans.

Yours,

D. H.”

Wilson was at present working in harmony with the Prime Minister, under whose restless impetus his mind was

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turned to seeking for some new man, some new way, some heaven-born genius or some cunning device which would bring about what they both desired—victory without casualties. But Haig dreamed no such dreams. He stared steadfastly at the realities. He had no fault to find either with his generals or with his troops, but he was fighting against superior forces and all he demanded was what he had been demanding for so long—reinforcements.

The fierce fighting still continued, and none knew when or where the next blow would fall. On the day on which Haig wrote the letter that has just been quoted a particularly violent attack was delivered on another section of the front. Haig gives the following account of what happened:

*“Wednesday, 24th April, 1918.*

“Glass steady. Misty morning. Dull day. Wind from north.

“After violent bombardment enemy attacked about 6.30 a.m. our front south of the Somme. Attack was at first repulsed, but aided by two groups of tanks (3 in each group) enemy pierced our line north of Hangard at two points, and captured Villers-Bretonneux.

“After seeing Cox the Q.M.G. and the Engineer-in-Chief, I motored to headquarters Fourth Army at Flixecourt and saw Sir H. Rawlinson about 12.30. By my instructions he telephoned to J. Du Cane, who is with Foch, to urge the latter to direct the French Moroccan Division to co-operate with our troops in order to retake Villers-Bretonneux by a counter-attack.

“I then went on to Dury headquarters III Corps. I found Butler living in my château there, and I lunched out of the lunch box in his dining room. Butler explained the situation. I felt very pleased at the quiet methodical way in which he was arranging for a counter-attack to retake the village of Villers-Bretonneux.

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“Butler was in command, with Heneker commanding 8th Division and Hobbs commanding 5th Australian Division by telephone. A combined attack by two Australian brigades and one of the 18th Division was arranged to go in at 8 p.m. I told Butler that I had telephoned to Foch from Fourth Army headquarters on my way to Dury to get him to order the French Moroccan Division to co-operate in this attack.

“Hearing that Du Cane was going to headquarters Fourth Army with instructions from Foch in reply to my message, I left Butler’s headquarters about 4 p.m. I saw Du Cane at Flixecourt and directed him to ask Foch (who had written his message under the idea that the Moroccan Division was preparing to counter-attack).

“(1) To order the Moroccan Division to attack with our troops *as soon as possible*.

“(2) Move up reserves on north of Somme to support the Australians between Albert and the Somme as the latter’s 2 reserve brigades had been sent to Butler to take part in the counter-attack.

“(3) To relieve Butler’s 3 divisions (8th, 18th and 58th) as soon as possible, because they had been in the battle since it began, and are getting used up. They consist mostly of young drafts.

“I then returned to Beaurepaire and wrote personally to Foch to the same effect.”

The counter-attack which had thus been prepared proved brilliantly successful. It was delivered at 10 p.m. The Australians and the men of the 18th Division covered themselves with glory. Fighting all through the night they had at daybreak surrounded Villers-Bretonneux, and they recaptured it in the morning.

On the same day, April 25th, a great German attack was delivered in the north. Kemmel was the main objective—

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both Kemmel village and Mount Kemmel to the southwest of it. This part of the British line was then held by French troops, who were unable to maintain their position. Kemmel had been considered impregnable, and the loss of it was a severe blow, necessitating a withdrawal of the whole line in that sector. Further assaults on the 27th and the 29th proved less effective, and may be taken as marking the end of the last stage of the battle that started on March 21st.

As April ended and as May began there was no man in France from the Commander-in-Chief down to the latest landed private soldier who could be aware of the fact that for the British Army the bitterness of death was past. Much fighting yet remained to do and heavy losses to be suffered, but there were to be no more surprises, no more headlong retreats, no more backs to the wall with anxious eyes turning to the left and to the right, to the Channel ports and the French Army.

None knew so well as Haig how near his army had come to disaster, but none had felt greater confidence than he, even in the darkest days, that disaster would be avoided. In the diary that he wrote from hour to hour can be found the deep anxiety that he often experienced, but from first to last there is not one note of pessimism, not one hint of despair. It has been shown that his only reason for doubting whether the enemy would deliver the great attack was his certainty that if they did so they would have sealed their doom. To General Edmunds, who dined with him on March 22nd, he said that the Germans had enough men to make three big attacks, and that if the French played up the attacks would be beaten off and that the Allies would win the war in the autumn. It was the first time that he had committed himself to so definite a prophecy, and he never wavered from it.

His confidence had two foundations—knowledge of the

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art of war and belief in the British soldier. The reverses which the British Army suffered in March and April he had foreseen and foretold. He had been asked to defend a longer line with fewer troops against a more numerous and better-equipped enemy. He had known what the result must be, and he had warned the Government. Afterwards he wasted no time in idle recriminations; but when deliberate attempts were made to falsify history he felt bound to protest.

On April 28th he wrote in his diary:

"I gave Lord Milner a note with reference to a statement by Mr. Bonar Law in the House of Commons in which he declared that the extension of the British lines had been *arranged between the commanders in France* without interference by the British Government. My note showed clearly how on 25th September last a conference (at which I was not present) was held at Boulogne, and the British and French Governments decided *on the principle* that the British should take over more line. Against this I protested. To-day I told Lord Milner I did not wish to embarrass the Government at this time, but I must ask that a true statement of the facts be filed in the War Office. Milner said he would be glad to do this, and that he recollected very well how all along I had objected to any extension. He (Milner) wishes to throw blame on no one, but is quite ready to accept all blame himself. 'Unfortunately', he said, 'some of the members of the Cabinet are not so constituted!'

"Milner has given me a very favourable impression as Secretary of State for War. He spent all yesterday afternoon and morning in the offices of G.H.Q. learning all he can; his one idea is to be as helpful as possible."

There was nothing military about Lord Milner, yet Haig found no difficulty in understanding him. His relations with Lord Kitchener and with Lord Derby, when they were

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at the War Office, had always been perfectly satisfactory, just as they had been with Haldane and with Asquith. Equally so were his relations with Lord Milner. It is impossible to pretend that Haig was a difficult man for politicians to deal with.

The private soldier was another man whom Haig understood, and who understood him though they had little to say to one another. When he did speak, as in his Army Order of April 11th, he used words which the men could understand, and which stirred their souls to that supreme effort with which they answered. Throughout these battles, as survivors testify, there was a high spirit of hope and gaiety among the British troops which had been lacking at Passchendaele and even on the Somme. Even retreat did not depress them unduly, for retreat meant movement, goodbye to the trenches; and they remembered how the retreat from Mons had been followed by the Battle of the Marne.

The Germans, on the other hand, were aware that this was their supreme effort for victory, and when they realised that it had failed their hearts failed too. On April 29th Haig received strikingly similar information from two independent witnesses.

General Godley, commanding the XXII Corps, "seemed very confident; and 'if' he said our divisions were only given a fortnight out of the battle we would be able to reorganise and then push the enemy back. The latter is not fighting as before".

That evening General Butler, commanding the III Corps, came to dinner. "He reported that the enemy was not fighting with the same determination he showed at the beginning of the battle. All our counter-attacks were then fought to a standstill; now our counter-attacks succeed and meet with little opposition. The prisoners too seem



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now to be careless as to who wins so long as the war ends.”

The long battle which thus drew to its end has been referred to often enough as a great defeat for the British Army. Nor can we quarrel with the word defeat, where there has been rapid retreat in accordance with no previous plan, fortified positions hastily abandoned, artillery, stores and equipment lost. Yet where there is defeat there should be victory, and what kind of a victory had the Germans won? Not a single main objective had been taken. Paris and the Channel ports were intact, the solidarity of the French and British Armies was unbroken. In return for far greater casualties than they had inflicted, and for the destruction of the flower of their last army, the enemy had won a few miles of devastated territory.

As the spring days of 1918 led on to summer hope grew in the hearts of the allied armies and belief turned to certainty in the mind of the British Commander-in-Chief.

## Chapter XXIV

### THE TURN OF THE TIDE

The three months that followed the collapse of the great German attack proved a period of comparative calm so far as the British front was concerned. The opportunity thus provided was not neglected. During the early days of May a renewal of the offensive was hourly expected and many reports were received which seemed to confirm that expectation. But as the month wore on, and nothing happened, the opinion grew that the British Army had little to fear in the near future. All efforts were turned to the work of reconstruction and preparation, and with a rapidity that was truly astonishing in view of what they had been through, the morale of the Army became completely restored, so that before the end of the summer the majority of the troops were eagerly expecting the next battle.

And the Americans were arriving. Haig's first impressions of Pershing were wholly favourable.

"I was much struck", he wrote on July 20th, 1917, "with his quiet gentlemanly bearing. Most anxious to learn and fully realises the greatness of the task before him."<sup>1</sup>

It was natural that Pershing should, as Haig put it, "hanker after a great self-contained American Army", but he had the good sense to realise that the most rapid and satisfactory method of creating such an army was to give the

<sup>1</sup>See also pp. 135 and 217.

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men who were to form it the opportunity of learning their profession on the battlefield, and that they could find no better teachers than the veteran soldiers of their ally, who spoke the same language as themselves.

An agreement was made that 120,000 American infantry should join the British Army during the month of May. Haig's view of the manner in which they should be treated is revealed in the following passage from his diary, written on May 7th:

“General Bonham Carter (Director of Training) reported on the arrangements made to receive and train the Americans. We are using the cadres of our 39th, 66th, 30th and 34th Divisions to help in the training of the infantry of four American divisions. I impressed on Bonham Carter that our officers are not to command and order the Americans about, but must only help American officers by their advice and experience to become both leaders in the field and also instructors. For the moment training as leaders should take first place.”

Not only had the Americans as much to learn as had the earliest battalions of Kitchener's armies in 1914, but they lacked such advantages as those armies possessed. They were without the trained non-commissioned officers to assist them, without a certain nucleus who had had some experience with the Territorials, and without the presence of a few veterans who had seen service in the South African War. The wonder was not how little they knew, but rather the rapidity with which they acquired knowledge.

At the end of the month Haig inspected the American troops that had already arrived, and recorded his impressions:

“I left by motor about ten a.m. with Major Bacon of the American Army, who is attached to my personal staff now as A.D.C. for American troops. Major Heseltine also ac-

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accompanied me. I spent the day with certain American divisions which are now training with the British Army.

“At Frivelle-Escarbotin, headquarters 66th Division, I saw Major-General Bethell commanding and his staff. General Burnham, commanding the American 82nd Division, was also present. After a short talk over the general arrangements for training, we motored to the neighbourhood of Tilloy Fleriville, where we got on some horses, and I spent a couple of hours riding about with one of the brigades which was training in a valley by companies. Shooting, bayonet practice, drill of platoons, etc., were all going on. I spoke a few words with each of the company commanders and as dinner time approached I went round most of the kitchens, examined the dinners and spoke to the cooks. All were quite happy, but some had nothing but canned meat, others had ample fresh meat, some had no salt, etc. I arrived at the conclusion that the fault with the American regiments is in the distribution of the supplies. The regimental and battalion staffs seem quite ignorant of how to look after their men.

“It was past 2 p.m. before I left this division. The men and young officers are active and keen to learn. The older officers are ignorant of their duties, but seem anxious to profit by our instruction—and get on well with their instructors.

“We lunched on the roadside after passing Gamach. I then visited headquarters 30th Division at Eu, where General Williams received me, also General Wright commanding 35th American Division, which is attached for training. I liked what I saw of Wright; he seemed a modest man, anxious that he should do what was best for his men, and that he should not fail in his command in battle. I thought that he had grounded the rank and file well in first principles. I saw two battalions on parade at Château la

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Hare, Bois l'Epine. These men came from Kansas and Missouri, 1200 miles west of New York. Fine big men, reminded me of tall Australians. Their drill was extremely good, very quick and smart. I was greatly pleased.

"Also went round the kitchens. Cooks complained of too much meat and no oatmeal, no hominy and no vegetables.

"I then motored to Huppy, headquarters American 33rd Division, and saw General Bell, commanding. This is a regular division. Bell is an old type of general, with moustaches and imperial on his chin, but ready for anything. He had a numerous staff including a dentist, a sanitary officer, a judge advocate, etc. This division is only now arriving from Brest.

"Summing up my impression of what I saw to-day, I was much pleased with what I saw of the men and young officers. The latter are a very keen and capable lot of young fellows, but all are very ignorant of military ways and arrangements and tactics.

"My scheme of using our 'cadre' divisions for training is working well."

The French had at one time been inclined to object to the attachment of so large a body of American troops to the British Army, but they had come to recognise the common sense of an arrangement whereby the Americans received training from men who spoke their language, it being well understood that as soon as they could be employed as independent units they would be at the disposal of the Generalissimo.

The system of unity of command was working satisfactorily. In normal times it differed very little, as has been already stated, from the system that preceded it. Tact was required on both sides, and tact was seldom lacking. If the correspondence which passed between Haig and Foch is

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examined, it will not be found to differ in tone from the correspondence which passed between Haig and Joffre, or between Haig and Pétain.

The following two letters are typical of many others:

“Headquarters—*May 3rd, 1918.*

“My dear Field Marshal,

The enemy attacks on the front Bailleul-Ypres have been stopped for the moment by our resistance. But they may begin again any day if the enemy is left free to act.

“He would be deprived of such freedom by a British offensive which, starting from the line Robecq-Festubert, would advance in the direction of Merville and Estaires. As soon as such an offensive could bring under its fire the lines of communication which cross at Estaires, the German attack north of the Lys in a westerly or north-westerly direction would be much interfered with and perhaps rendered impossible.

“These extremely important results could be obtained by a limited advance, and in a sector which seems to provide a favourable starting point, especially from the point of view of artillery.

“The British Army should have at its disposal the necessary troops for such an offensive. The Canadian Corps, for instance, which is well up to strength, might be employed.

“A similar French offensive is now in course of preparation. Like the above, it will give the allied armies the means of re-establishing their moral ascendancy over the enemy.

“I have the honour to request the Field-Marshal Commander-in-Chief of the British Army to be good enough to let me know whether he can without delay undertake the study and then the preparation of the offensive outlined above.

Yours very sincerely

F. Foch.”

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To which the following reply was returned:

“In reply to your letter No. 564, dated 3rd May, I beg to inform you that an offensive operation as described by you is in course of preparation at the present moment by the General Officer Commanding British First Army, and could be carried out at comparatively short notice.

“The Canadian Corps, less one division, has been withdrawn from the line for this purpose.

“I am, however, of opinion that the present moment is not a suitable time for the delivery of a small offensive operation of this nature. The enemy is evidently making preparations for an attack on a considerable scale on the British front, and I shall require all my available reserves in order to withstand such an attack.

“Meanwhile, as stated above, I am pressing forward with preparations for the offensive operation outlined by you, and shall be prepared to launch it when a favourable opportunity arises.

“I trust that these arrangements will be agreeable to you.

“I note with satisfaction that an offensive is about to be delivered by the French Army.

D. Haig,  
Field Marshal.”

It will be seen that there is nothing in the tone of this correspondence which could suggest that the writers are superior and subordinate officers. It is the correspondence of two allies who are collaborating, on the clear understanding that it is the duty of the Frenchman to take the initiative in laying down the main lines of military policy and of strategy, and that it is the duty of the British Commander-in-Chief to do everything possible to meet his wishes.

It has been seen how when the principle of a Generalis-

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simo was accepted one of the advantages appeared to be that Foch had the French as well as the British Commander-in-Chief under his control, and that it was therefore no more derogatory to Haig than it was to Pétain. If such a consideration had ever been present to Haig's mind—and there is no indication in his diary that it had been—it is plain that it no longer carried any weight with him. On May 2nd there was a conference at Abbeville. After certain preliminary matters had been discussed the soldiers withdrew.

“M. Clemenceau, Lloyd George and Lord Milner were to discuss privately who was to succeed Foch if anything happened to him. I told Milner that the best arrangement would be to decide that the Commander-in-Chief of the French Army would be *ipso facto* ‘Generalissimo’ (because the latter must be a Frenchman in France). Foch then would be Commander-in-Chief French Army as well as ‘Generalissimo’, and have the G.Q.G. under him. At present he lacks a staff and in consequence he and Weygand are overworked. Having given Foch ‘a staff’, we get continuity. Then the French Government should be asked to nominate (privately) either Anthoine or Pétain to be Foch's successor in case of necessity. Milner agreed, and said he would express my views.”

Haig's attitude with regard to the whole question was determined by characteristic common sense and by characteristic selflessness. He had proposed unity of command for a definite purpose—to prevent a breach between the two armies. He had carried his proposal and his purpose had been accomplished. But the principle of unity of command once accepted could not be dropped. It had assumed too important a position in the minds and imaginations of the allied nations. Haig realised that this was so and never suggested going back on the agreement. He realised also that, although in this fourth year of the war the British



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Army was the most important fighting force in the field, nevertheless the Generalissimo must always be a Frenchman. Reviewing with his clear and steady vision all the facts of the situation, he had only one desire, that the system should work. That desire is apparent in the last quotation from the diary. He had hitherto worked well with Foch, whose views on all important matters connected with the war were identical with his own. He believed that he could work well with Anthoine, of whom he had a high opinion, which unfortunately Foch did not share. He had always worked well with Pétain until that day in March when Pétain had contemplated dividing the two armies. He foresaw that such a situation might arise again—even with Foch—a situation where he might consider that his own army was being endangered by the decision of the Generalissimo. He was anxious before all things to prevent such a situation from arising and therefore he put forward the eminently sensible suggestion that the Generalissimo should be provided with an adequate general staff. No question of personal dignity ever entered into his calculations. On May 5th "General J. Cowans (Q.M.G. of the Forces) arrived from London in time for dinner. He is on his way to Paris to attend a conference on the question of pooling all army supplies in France. The French want to make me supreme administrator in France of allied supplies, in the same way as Foch controls the strategy.

"I think the proposal would be a mistake."

It was not Haig, but Henry Wilson, the admirer of all things French and the idolator of Foch, who now began to fear lest the French should obtain too great an ascendancy. On May 16th he wrote to Haig:

"My General,

I hope your meeting with Foch to-day goes off well. We are in difficult and delicate times.

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“The French are shaping to take us over administratively as well as strategically. This will not do. Milner is quite clear that it cannot be allowed. The Americans want to pool food. Someone else wants to pool oats. Someone else wants to pool tanks. Someone else wants to pool aeroplanes. Meanwhile our tired divisions commence a roulement, and little by little and bit by bit our glorious Army will disappear. Our bases will be taken over followed by our Mercantile Marine followed by the Royal Navy. I write half in joke, whole in earnest. When one sees a danger it is not difficult to avoid it. But don't let us have any illusions.”

Haig had no illusions. He had seen the danger long before Wilson had, and he was now confident of his ability to avoid it. The meeting with Foch to which Wilson referred in his letter is recounted in the diary as follows:

“General Foch and Weygand arrived a little before 12 o'clock. Foch is very anxious that no divisions should be reduced; he is sure that, out of the '1,400,000 men wearing khaki in England', 100,000 could be obtained to fill out nine divisions sufficiently to hold a quiet part of the front, and release fresh French divisions for the General Reserve. So I agree to write a letter to our War Office asking for men of the lower class than 'A' men for this purpose. Clemenceau is also to press on the Prime Minister the urgent need of sending soldiers to France.

“Foch also explained to me an offensive project which he wishes to carry out if the enemy does not launch his big attack within the next few weeks. I agreed with his general plan, and said I would study my share of the undertaking and let him know. But he must not write his plan nor allow the French commanders to talk about it. Success will depend mainly on secrecy.

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“Foch stayed to lunch. He was most pleasant and anxious to be helpful.”

This is the first mention of preparations for the great advance which was to win the war. Haig lost no time in carrying the matter a stage further. On the following morning he motored to the headquarters of the Fourth Army at Flixecourt and had a long talk with Rawlinson. Only their two chiefs of staff, Lawrence and Montgomery, were present. “I told Rawlinson to begin studying in conjunction with General Debeney the question of an attack from the French front south of Roye. I gave him details of the scheme.

“At Bertangles (H.Q. Australian Corps) I saw General Birdwood, and had a long talk with him and his staff. The Australian Corps is diminishing owing to lack of drafts. He does not think enemy means to attack his front at the present time.

“It was now about 1.30 and I lunched in a field near. At 2.15 I attended a parade of the 10th Brigade, 3rd Australian Division east of the latter village. General Monash commands the division and McNicoll the brigade. About two miles further on, I inspected the 11th Brigade under Brigadier-General Cannon. In both cases I walked down the front rank and returned through the centre of the masses, i.e. between the 2nd and 3rd platoons. I thus got an additional sight of the men. Troops then marched past. It was a grand sight. Troops marched well, and were well turned out. The transport too was well cleaned and the animals well groomed and in good condition. The Australian is a different individual now to when he first came, both in discipline and smartness. Altogether it was a most inspiring sight. I said a few words to each of the battalion commanders after the parade, and urged that attention be paid to tactical training of battalion and company officers.

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“At St. Gratian H.Q. 2nd Australian Division, I saw General Smyth and his staff officers. This division holds the front from the Ancre to the Somme running along the high ground. All very fit and in good heart.”

A few days later he visited the Canadians. “At Pernes I spent three-quarters of an hour with General Currie (commanding Canadian Corps) and his staff. All the three Canadian divisions are now out of the line in reserve, and Currie fully realises that circumstances may necessitate putting them into the battle as required, even though the whole corps may not be employed together. He assured me that I could rely on him and his divisions to do their best, however employed. The divisions are now training and are 50 per cent better than when they first came out of the line.

“At Ferfay, headquarters XIII Corps, I saw General Morland. His sector is in front of Hinges, and Mont Berenchon to Calonne, and is held by two divisions. He thinks that the enemy has abandoned the idea of attacking here at present. A division has been withdrawn, guns are further off, and enemy is putting up wire and strengthening his defences. Enemy has had very heavy losses owing to our artillery fire on roads and approaches. Water being near surface, trenches cannot be dug everywhere and breastworks are necessary. These are very visible and easily destroyed.

“Headquarters 3rd Division at La Bouvrière. Major-General Deverell, commanding division, told me of his fighting south of Arras and then north of Lys. He spoke of the fine performance of the last drafts of young soldiers. Our main difficulty now is the lack of *trained* battalion and company commanders.

“Headquarters 4th Division at Bas Rieux (near Lillers). Major-General Matheson (Coldstream Guards), whose company was judged the best at company training before

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the war at Aldershot, has made the 4th Division into one of the best in the Army. Matheson thinks the enemy is not preparing to attack on his sector now. Our defences are now good and consist of several well-wired lines. Enemy is not showing fight here now when our men raid."

If proof were needed, and it hardly can be by anyone who has read this book so far, that Haig was above all personal intrigue and took no interest in political squabbles even when they affected his own position, such proof should be provided by the perusal of his diary during this month of May. For while there was calm in France there were storms in the House of Commons, and the intriguers were busy at their work. Henry Wilson, while writing Haig friendly, almost affectionate letters, was secretly advising the politicians to dismiss him,<sup>1</sup> and the Prime Minister was fighting against a formidable array of facts to prove that the reverses of March and April had been due to the incompetence of the soldiers in France and not to his own policy in refusing to send reinforcements and insisting upon an extension of the British line.

It has been seen that when Mr. Bonar Law made an inaccurate statement with regard to the extension of the line Haig, unwilling to embarrass the Government, had merely written to the War Office asking that for purposes of historical accuracy the true facts should be put upon record. Others took a more serious view of the false information with which the Government at this time was assiduously flooding the press and misleading the public. On May 7th Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice, who had been Director of Military Operations in the previous month, published a letter in the press categorically contradicting the above statement of Bonar Law, and describing as untrue the Prime Minister's assertion that "the army in

<sup>1</sup> See "*Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson*," Vol. II, p. 99.

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France was considerably stronger on January 1st, 1918, than on January 1st, 1917”.

When questioned on the matter in the House of Commons, Bonar Law replied that as these allegations affected the honour of Ministers it was proposed to invite two judges to enquire into their accuracy; but when two days later Mr. Asquith moved that the matter should be referred to a Select Committee the Government opposed and defeated the motion and no enquiry was ever held.

To these events, which profoundly interested the Army, not even a passing reference is made in the well-filled pages of the Commander-in-Chief's diary. He was not interested. He knew the facts and he knew that they would become known to posterity. For the present his sole concern was to win the war. A correspondence which took place at this time exemplifies his attitude. Repington, as has already been stated, had left the *Times* rather than be a party to deceiving the public, and had since been writing for the *Morning Post*. In February he had been prosecuted and punished for warning the country of what was about to happen in March. The question how far a man is justified during a war in criticising his own Government and thereby giving encouragement and possibly information to the enemy is a difficult one to determine. Lady Bathurst, the owner of the *Morning Post*, had not unjustifiable doubts as to the usefulness of Repington's activities and therefore adopted the sensible course of addressing an enquiry direct to the Commander-in-Chief.

“Pinbury Park,  
Cirencester,

May 24, 1918.

“Dear Sir Douglas,

I have never had the pleasure of meeting you, though I know Lady Haig, but I am writing now to ask

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you a question, in my capacity of newspaper proprietor. It is this. Can you tell me whether you consider Colonel Repington's articles in the *Morning Post* are of any use or service to the Army? It is a matter upon which I am not competent to judge. I rely upon Mr. Gwynne's judgment but I think that he has never asked you for an opinion on this subject. I want you to believe, as I am sure you do, that both my husband and I and Mr. Gwynne have only one wish, and that is to serve in any way we can the interests of the British Army. I have had grave doubts lately as to whether our military correspondent was not doing more harm than good. That is why I should be grateful for your opinion on the subject and you may rest assured that the matter will go no further than between Bathurst, myself and Mr. Gwynne. If you consider that Col. Repington is doing good service to the Army, well and good, I have no more to say; but if not I shall know what course to adopt. Please forgive me for troubling you at a time when you must have so great a weight of anxiety and responsibility, but the matter is rather important.

Yours sincerely

Lilias Bathurst."

Haig replied as follows:

*"Personal and Private.*

General Headquarters,  
British Armies in France.

*Monday 27th May, 18.*

"Dear Lady Bathurst,

In reply to your letter of 24th inst. owing to stress of work since the battle began in March, I have not been able to read Colonel Repington's recent articles very carefully, but I have no hesitation in saying that in the past Colonel Repington has rendered very great service not only to the Army but to our country. And I am confident that he is

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capable of doing so now. I venture however to make one suggestion and that is that in his articles Colonel Repington be urged to deal as seldom as possible with persons, but to devote his energies to enlightening the public as to what success in war depends on, and to set his pen firmly against any departure from sound principle which he may notice either at home, out here or indeed anywhere! At the present crisis in our country's history, it is of all things necessary that our fellow citizens be united and show a firm front everywhere to the enemy. Hence no matter how much one may dislike the methods of some of our rulers we must sink personal feelings for the time being, and do our duty as best we can.

"I hope these remarks may be of some help. I am only sorry that I am not able to answer your question more fully, and with kind regards,

Believe me,

Yours v. truly

D. Haig."

As the month of May drew to its close the probability of an attack on the British front appeared to diminish, but reports began to be received which indicated the likelihood of an attack on the French. Foch was at first unwilling to believe them. On the 15th "General Du Cane came to lunch. He says that as each day passes without the enemy's attacking, Foch's spirits improve. Foch thinks the enemy must be in some difficulty." Ten days later, however, information was received at British headquarters which pointed to a pending attack on the Chemin des Dames, where four tired British divisions under the G.O.C. IX Corps had been sent for rest and were holding part of the line. On the evening of May 26th Haig wrote, "Evening reports show increased artillery activity all along our front,



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but no signs of where attack will fall. In reply to our warning French G.Q.G. and our IX Corps reported this morning 'no sign of attack on the Aisne'." The next morning the attack on the Aisne was delivered and for several days caused the Generalissimo the keenest anxiety. On the first day the enemy crossed the Aisne, on the second he was beyond the river Vesle, and on the third the French Army found themselves once more on the banks of the Marne. On the last day of the month Haig lunched with Foch at Sarcus.

"After lunch I had a talk with Foch. Present were Lawrence, Weygand and Du Cane. We spoke of the possibility of supporting the French with some divisions. I said it all depended on the situation on my front and read a translation of my note on the question. Foch also said that Pétain had asked for American divisions to be sent him (no matter how untrained), to hold long fronts (25 kilo) on the Swiss frontier, and release French divisions. I gave some good reasons against the proposal, but said I would consider the matter and reply on Saturday (to-morrow). I also promised to go into the possibilities of forming a corps of three divisions as a reserve to support the French in case of grave emergency. While we were talking a message came from Pétain asking Foch to meet him near Meaux, and stating that M. Clemenceau, the French Prime Minister, would be there too. Foch told me that the situation was anxious; the reserves which had been sent forward had 'melted away very quickly'. Foch and Weygand started at once. I thought Foch looked more anxious than I have ever seen him."

These were indeed days of grave anxiety for the Generalissimo. His faith in victory was unshaken. He saw, as Haig had seen, that once the spring offensive was exhausted every factor in the situation would favour the Allies' cause. But now there seemed to be a real danger lest this last effort

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of the enemy should prove disastrous to his plans. There were those in England who now believed that the French Army was beaten, just as there had been some in France two months before who believed the same of the British Army; and serious enquiry was held as to whether it would be possible for the British and Americans to continue fighting in France with the French Army no longer in the field, and Paris in the hands of the enemy.

Haig never took this gloomy view, but as the French retreat continued and the demands for assistance increased he began to grow concerned for the safety of his own forces. Opposite to him was the army of the Crown Prince Rupprecht with powerful reserves, which, information showed, had not been drawn upon. All evidence from every source pointed to the imminence of an attack, and subsequent knowledge has confirmed that such an attack was intended, although it was never delivered. It was in these circumstances that there arose one of the two disagreements which, during the whole period of their collaboration, divided Haig and Foch.

At a meeting at Versailles on June 1st, when Clemenceau, Lloyd George and Milner were present, Foch repeated the proposal made at Sarcus that the American divisions at present training with the British should take over a quiet portion of the French front in order to relieve a similar number of French troops to take part in the battle. Haig was strongly opposed to the proposal. He was prepared to expedite the training of the Americans and hoped to have some of them ready by the middle of the month. Meanwhile it would be waste of such valuable material to send them, half trained, to a sector where they would see no fighting. Moreover, it was his private conviction, to which he could hardly give utterance, that these fresh troops, full of enthusiasm, the flower of American manhood, would

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prove more formidable fighters than the weary, war-worn veterans of France.

No settlement of this question was reached at Versailles and subsequently Foch obtained Pershing's consent to his proposal. With Foch and Pershing in agreement with regard to the disposal of American troops there was nothing left for Haig but to bow to the decision.

On June 4th Foch telegraphed to Haig asking him to place three divisions astride the Somme in order to protect what both believed to be the most vital link in the chain, the point of contact between the two Armies. But Haig considered that he could not move so many troops without endangering his whole army. He replied, therefore, that he was complying with Foch's orders immediately, but that he wished to make a formal protest against any troops leaving his command until the bulk of the reserves of Prince Rupprecht's armies had become involved in the battle. At the same time Haig sent copies of both telegrams to the Secretary of State for War for the information of the War Cabinet.

It has been seen how at Beauvais on April 3rd it was agreed that each commander-in-chief should have the right of appeal to his Government in certain circumstances. Milner appears to have considered that Haig's protest, and the fact that he had sent a copy of it to the War Office, constituted such an appeal. Haig had not intended it to do so. A man does not make the final appeal to Caesar by merely forwarding copies of correspondence without even a covering letter.

However, a meeting was arranged to take place in Paris on June 7th. Lord Milner and Sir Henry Wilson were present, as well as Haig, Lawrence and Du Cane, Clemenceau, Foch and Weygand.

"Lord Milner explained why the British Prime Minister

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had asked for this meeting; briefly Foch had moved many reserves (French and American divisions) from behind the British front and, in view of the large number of enemy reserves still available for action against the British, the Government had become genuinely anxious.

"I then read my memorandum stating I was in full accord with Foch as to the necessity for making all *preparations* for moving British troops to support the French in case of necessity. But I asked that I should be consulted before a definite order to move any divisions from the British area was given. I had repeated to London the telegram which I had sent to Foch, in order to warn the British Government that the situation was quickly reaching a stage in which circumstances might compel me to appeal to them (the British Cabinet) under the Beauvais agreement. In my opinion the order about to be issued by Foch imperilled the British Army in France. I hoped that everything that forethought could do would be done now, and in the immediate future, to prevent circumstances arising which would necessitate such an appeal. Foch stuck out for full powers as Generalissimo, to order troops of any nationality wherever he thought fit and at shortest notice. Milner and Clemenceau agreed that he must have these powers, and the latter urged Foch and myself to meet more frequently. Clemenceau strongly forbade any orders being sent direct from French headquarters moving French or any unit in my area, without passing through my hands first of all. This was with reference to the departure of certain French divisions and guns from the *Détachement de l'Armée du Nord*, which had been ordered direct, without even notifying General Plumer or G.H.Q. on the subject.

"The effect of the Beauvais agreement is now becoming clearer in practice. This effect I had realised from the beginning, namely that the responsibility for the safety of the

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British Army in France could no longer rest with me, because the Generalissimo can do what *he* thinks right with *my* troops. On the other hand, the British Government is only now beginning to understand what Foch's powers as Generalissimo amount to. This delegation of power to Foch is inevitable, but I intend to ask that the British Government should in a document modify my responsibility for the safety of the British Army under these altered conditions.

"The C.I.G.S. asked Foch if he still adhered to the same strategical policy as he enunciated at Abbeville on 2nd May. Foch replied that he did, namely first to secure the connection of the British and French armies—second to cover both Paris and the Channel ports. And in reply to Foch I said that I agreed with these principles."

After the meeting Haig and Foch left together for the latter's office at the Invalides and had a perfectly amicable discussion with regard to certain military matters. The incident had in no way impaired their good understanding. In accordance with Haig's desire Milner furnished him with a new set of instructions which, together with the original ones received from Kitchener, will be found in appendix C.

It was the general opinion of all concerned that the meeting had been useful. It had cleared the air and clarified the situation. Tact and good humour had been displayed on all sides. Milner had supported Foch and Clemenceau had stood up for Haig. No real difference of opinion had been revealed and for the next four months no cloud disturbed the harmonious relations of the two great soldiers.

Haig continued to watch closely the development of the American Army, and his impressions continued to grow more favourable. On June 12th, "I visited the 326th Regiment of the 62nd Division (American)—General Burn-

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ham. I saw a battalion attacking, others shooting on the seashore, etc., General Bethell and our 66th Divisional staff are training this division.

“Near St. Valéry I saw more machine-gunners of the American 82nd Division under a Major Pike. Fine-looking fellows and all very keen. The 82nd Division leaves on the 15th June for the French area. Several American officers said how sorry they were to leave the British.

“We then motored across the Somme via Noyelles to La Bassée (near Rue), where the 107th Regiment and 14 machine-gun companies of the American 27th Division were drawn up in line for my inspection. General Pierce commands the brigade and O’Ryan the division. The men stood well on parade and presented a fine appearance. This is a division of the National Guard of the New York State. It has been in camp training on the Mexican border for the last year, and seemed much better disciplined than any other American troops I have yet inspected. After I had walked down the line, the troops marched past by companies. This was done extremely well. Companies were 250 strong, and a machine-gun battalion 742. So that there were nearly 6000 troops on parade. The men carried huge packs on their backs, yet they marched well, and kept their dressing admirably. They were evidently much pleased at my inspection. I complimented General O’Ryan on his fine command.

“We had tea with General Pierce in a château close to Rue. Pierce has recently taken command of the brigade; before that he was on the General Staff at Washington. He told me of the tremendous efforts now being made by America to equip and organise a large army. Both Generals Pierce and O’Ryan struck me as capable men, but without much experience of command. I expect that the Americans will soon produce fairly good staff officers, but the diffi-

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culties are greater in the production of commanders. This will be difficult to overcome."

On June 14th, "I breakfasted early and motored to Nordausques (between St. Omer and Calais) and spent the morning (10.30 to 1 o'clock) riding about looking at the work of the 30th American Division. I was accompanied by Thompson and Fletcher; and Major Robert Bacon (American Army) attached to my personal staff, Major-General Blacklock and the staff of our 35th Division are helping this lot of Americans to train. Major-General George Read commands the American 30th Division. He was yesterday appointed to command the American II Corps. I think he should do this satisfactorily. He seemed to me too old for the duties of a G.O.C. *division*, but he knows the fundamental principles of war, and should do well as a *corps* commander to start with. I saw companies of the 119th, 118th and 117th Regiments at work. The men looked in fine form, and very keen; these remarks apply equally to the officers.

"I next motored to the training area near Lumbres, lunching by the roadside on the way, and spent a couple of hours with the American 78th Division (Major-General Macree). The troops have only been here two or three days, and only begin their scheme of training on Monday. Major-General Nicholson 34th Division is (with his staff) helping these Americans to train. All seem to get on very well together.

"The 312th Regiment (Lieut.-Colonel Anderson) was drawn up on parade for my inspection. I was much impressed; they are a fine body of men, keen, active and athletic looking.

"On the way back to Montreuil, I halted in Samer at the headquarters of the American 80th Division and made the acquaintance of Major-General Croukhite, commanding

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the division. He is a fine hearty fellow ready to go into battle at once if necessary with his division."

Haig's high opinion of the American troops was shared by the French. On June 17th he wrote in his diary:

"General de Laguiche, who has just returned from Foch's headquarters and G.Q.G., states that the feeling in the French Army has now changed regarding the Americans. Everyone now says that 'they are splendid fighters' and that it would be 'folly to send them to a quiet sector in the Vosges, where they would only deteriorate'. General Fayolle commanding the G.A. Reserve (in which is the French First Army) states that the American 1st Division, which is under him, is 'the best division which he has in his army group'."

The flow of visitors continued. The contact with interesting and diverse personalities formed for Haig a pleasant relief from military preoccupations. Of Mr. Andrew Weir, afterwards Lord Inverforth, he wrote, "He is quite a wonderful man, judging from the way he has organised the supplies of raw material all over the world for the benefit of Great Britain. He foresees the necessity for our manufacturers to have adequate raw material both now and when peace comes. He told me that the state of supplies of all kinds in England now is more satisfactory than it has ever been. I found him a most intelligent and agreeable fellow."

On June 17th the King of the Belgians came to luncheon and had a long conversation with Haig. "He was anxious, he said, to see me because he did not know what the intentions of the French were. President Poincaré had told him that the best plan was to reduce our front by abandoning the Channel ports and holding the line of the Somme. I told the King that Foch's strategical plan was to defend Paris *and* the Channel ports, and I had every confidence in our being able to do so. The King was cheered by my state-



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ment. He said that the interests of Great Britain and Belgium were one and the same, and the Belgian Army would fight as part of the British Army. I found the King very straightforward and intelligent, but very shy."

The friendly relations existing between Haig and Foch are illustrated by the following accounts of interviews that took place during the month of June.

On the 18th, "I left by motor at 8.30 a.m. with General Davidson and Alan for Mouchy-le-Châtel (near Noailles) where we arrived at 11.30 a.m. Whilst Davidson telephoned to G.H.Q. I walked with Alan in the grounds of the château. The latter is an old house, but spoilt by the hand of some modern architect who has added a number of florid decorations, and several little turrets and busts—all so out of keeping with the solid simplicity of the old house. The place belongs to the Duchess de Mouchy, an old lady of 80 years of age who lives in Paris. She is said to be the granddaughter of Napoleon's General Murat. We lunched under the trees from our lunch box, and at 12.45 I and Davidson went over to the château to meet General Foch, who had come from the Grand Quartier général to see me. With Foch were Generals Weygand and Du Cane.

"Our conference took place in one of the salons of the château, in which hung a great picture of Murat looking like a half-caste but beautifully dressed!

"Foch was in good form. He was pleased with the Italian situation and with the fighting qualities shown by the American divisions. By next April Pershing is to have 80 American divisions in France. The question of providing efficient divisional commanders will be a difficult one for the Americans to solve.

"Foch was anxious about reserves. I showed him how mine were disposed. He was quite satisfied and gave it as his opinion that I should keep strong reserves both on the

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Somme and also in my northern sector. The centre could then readily be supported. This is practically my present arrangement.

“Foch has to keep strong French reserves to cover Paris. I asked him if he was satisfied that the present French forces on my right were adequate for holding Gentelles and the Villers-Bretonneux ridge. He considered that they were.

“As regards defences he found the British had done well in making new lines, but the switch to connect British and French systems south-west of Amiens, which, by agreement, the French were to make, had not been begun. This he is to see to. We also discussed the principles of defence and how to meet German methods of attack. I found we were in agreement. Foch laid great stress on holding ‘the second system’ (i.e. our reserve zone) with fresh troops, as soon as the bombardment commences. I told him that was our arrangement also, but sometimes we had not had sufficient troops for the purpose. I am using American troops to hold rear lines in some sectors of my front.

“Altogether the meeting was most friendly. Foch made his apologies for bringing me so far away from G.H.Q. to meet him, but it was unavoidable because he has to see Generals Pétain and Pershing this afternoon. Foch’s headquarters at present are about thirty miles east of Paris, but he retains Mouchy and also Sarcus in case the battle breaks out again in the northern sector.”

Two days later there was another meeting at the same place. “At 9 a.m. I left with General Lawrence and Fletcher by motor for Mouchy-le-Châtel. We got there at 12 o’clock. General Foch had already arrived, and was having his lunch—a sardine and hard-boiled egg, as it was Friday, he told me. Since my last visit all the pictures have been removed from their frames and sent away for safety.

“Foch seemed in the best of spirits owing partly to the

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delay in the enemy's attack, partly to the success of the Italians, and largely to the report of a speech recently made by Kühlmann in Berlin, which stated that there was no hope of the Germans ending the war by military means alone and foreshadowing the German Government's intention of opening direct communication with the allied Governments.

"The first question raised by Foch was the relief of the whole of the *Détachement de l'Armée du Nord* as soon as possible. He said that the French Government was alarmed about Paris, and wished to have adequate reserves to protect the capital. I pointed out that I could only relieve the D.A.N. at once by depleting my reserves on part of my front, that this would mean running extra risks; if, however, Paris were really in danger, the risk must be taken. Foch said that the French Government insisted on the D.A.N. being withdrawn *on account of Paris*. I therefore agreed to release the divisions of the D.A.N. as soon as possible, and will let him have the exact dates on my return to G.H.Q.

"I asked Foch to arrange to place one or two good French divisions near Dunkirk so as to be in a position to support the Belgians in case of necessity. He agreed with me that such a disposition was desirable, and he would try and arrange it, but for the moment no French troops could be spared.

"He asked me to arrange for an offensive 'at the end of August'. The French would also carry out an offensive, but not the Montdidier-Noyon project, because it was more important to drive the enemy back elsewhere. I told Foch of two small offensive projects which I contemplated carrying out, if the military situation allowed.

"He was pleased at my holding offensive intentions at the present time.

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"We finished our talk about 2 o'clock, and then he walked with me down the hill from the château to the lake, where I had sent Alan with the lunch box. Foch then left us; I sent him in my motor back to the house, as he is not a great walker, particularly up hill."

The *Détachement de l'Armée du Nord*, familiarly known as D.A.N., had been under Haig's command since the earliest days of Foch's appointment as Generalissimo. On June 30th they were withdrawn and Haig said goodbye to General de Mitry who had commanded them. "He is of opinion", wrote Haig, "that the Germans have finished their preparations for an attack against the Mont des Cats and adjoining hills. He was presented yesterday with the K.C.B. by the Duke of Connaught. He expressed himself as very sorry to leave my command."

During the whole of June and July the attack that never came was hourly expected. On the 21st Haig wrote, "Another quiet night on our front. It is hard to find a good reason for the enemy's delay in getting in his attacks against us. He has the troops available, and his preparations are complete, so I had imagined that we would have been attacked soon after the attack against Compiègne had stopped. We hear from prisoners that many Germans are suffering from what they call 'Flanders fever', i.e. influenza, which lasts a week and leaves those infected very weak. So I think that possibly this epidemic may have caused the delay."

As the Germans remained quiescent the Allies became active; as anxieties with regard to defence diminished, schemes of attack increasingly occupied the minds of Haig and Foch. One of the first of these was carried out by the Australians early in July. On the 1st of the month, "I left about 10 a.m. with General Birch and Heseltine, and visited General Monash, commanding Australian Corps—head-

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quarters at Château de Bertangles. I went about an operation which he is shortly to carry out with the Australian Corps. Monash is a most thorough and capable commander, who thinks out every detail of any operation and leaves nothing to chance. I was greatly impressed with his arrangements. A company of American infantry (33rd Division) will be attached to each of the ten Australian battalions detailed for the attack."

A meeting of the Supreme War Council took place at Versailles on July 2nd. There was much talk about the use of American troops and the allocation of British tonnage. Mr. Lloyd George and M. Tardieu argued with some heat, but very little was agreed upon and nothing accomplished. "So far as I was concerned," wrote Haig, "it was a complete waste of a couple of hours."

Then next morning he visited "General Pershing at his house 73 rue de Varennes. A fine old mansion with large garden in the Faubourg St. Germain, which has been modernised by some wealthy American.<sup>1</sup>

"I was with him for well over an hour and we got on very well indeed. We agreed about the necessity of Foch's having an adequate staff with headquarters located in a central position, say at Chantilly. Also that Foch should have periodical meetings with his three C.-in-C.'s to discuss future plans. Pershing is most anxious that I should visit him at his headquarters at Chaumont; I promised to do so when things are quieter. He said the French are always buzzing about and he wished that the British C.-in-C. would come and see him. As regards his troops' taking part in operations with Australians to-morrow morning, he thought them insufficiently trained, and had told Rawlinson yesterday that he did not wish them used. I asked him if he wished me to interfere in the matter,

<sup>1</sup>It belongs to the Earl and Countess of Granard.



HAIG AND BALFOUR AT VERSAILLES, 2 JULY 1918  
*Imperial War Museum Photograph. Copyright Reserved*



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but he said 'no, that all had been settled between him and Rawlinson'.

"I left Paris about 12.15 and motored via Beauvais and lunched in the wood by the roadside to the north of the town. Horses met us at Nampont, and I reached Beaurépaires about 6.30 p.m.

"Before dinner and again at 11 p.m. Lawrence spoke to me regarding the Americans taking part in the Australian operations. . . . Some six companies had been withdrawn, about four could not be withdrawn; were the operations to be stopped in order to do so? I said, No. 'The first essential is to improve our position east of Amiens as soon as possible. The attack must therefore be launched as prepared, even if a few American detachments cannot be got out before zero hour.'

"Mr. Sargent, the painter, came to dinner and stayed the night."

The following morning was the 4th of July—a suitable date for the Americans to receive their baptism of fire, and together with the Australians they acquitted themselves nobly. The attack was completely successful. The British line was advanced on a front of four miles to a distance of a mile and a half. The village of Hamel and the ridge to the east of it were captured. Over 1500 prisoners were taken and 103 machine guns, 12 trench mortars and 77 field guns.

On July 5th Haig presided over a meeting of his army commanders, where many matters were discussed. The question of training and the appointment of an Inspector General of Training formed one of the principal subjects. Haig's pencilled comment at the bottom of a memorandum on this subject is worth preserving:

"Success in war depends more on moral than on physical qualities. No amount of skill can make up for lack of courage, energy or determination. But without careful pre-



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paration and skilful direction high moral qualities may not avail—

“First objective—develop the necessary moral qualities.

“Next—organisation and discipline, to enable those qualities to be controlled and meet the requirement.

“Third—skill in applying the power thus conferred on the troops.

“Fundamental principles of war are simple: application of them is difficult and cannot be made subject to rules. *Study and practice.*”

After this full discussion with his army commanders, after the brilliant success of July 4th and as no counter-attack from the enemy seemed likely, Haig considered that he was entitled to a short holiday such as he had not enjoyed since the middle of March. He had left England on the day after the birth of his son who was now nearly four months old. On July 6th he crossed the Channel and found himself that evening at Kingston Hill. “I found everything looking so peaceful and well cared for. The baby is in splendid fettle and all seem very pleased to see me.” It was a modest comment.

His week's holiday passed quickly. He played tennis or golf daily with his wife and with General Davidson, who had travelled with him from France. Although living in the suburbs he only went into London for the obligatory interviews with the King, with Queen Alexandra, with the Secretary of State for War and the Prime Minister.

The last mentioned he found “annoyed with the French, because, although the British had carried in their ships fifteen American divisions since April, only five were now in the British zone and in a position to support the British Army in case of attack. There are nine American divisions with the French Army, and another nine or ten divisions training in rear. Wilson had accordingly been ordered to

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draft a letter to Foch pointing this out, and asking him to replace the five American divisions which had been equipped by the British and were now in the French area—also asking him to hasten the supply of guns for the five American divisions not with the British. The Prime Minister stated that he would send a letter himself to Clemenceau on the subject.”

It seems a curious process of reasoning which led the Prime Minister to argue that because American troops had been brought to Europe in British ships they should therefore be employed in that section of the front which was for the time being held by the British Army. Such a point of view seems to differ widely from that which had inspired the principle of unity of command. The fact was that Lloyd George's vigorous but volatile mind was no longer so impressed with the advantages conferred by a Generalissimo, and he was beginning to be apprehensive, as was Henry Wilson, lest the French should abuse the authority that had been entrusted to them.

Haig was not therefore surprised when a few days later he received a direct encouragement from his Government to resist the orders of Foch. He returned to France on July 14th. He reached his château at Beaurepaire about 2 p.m. and found Lawrence waiting for him.

“Apparently, without any definite facts to go on, Foch has made up his mind that the enemy's main attack is about to fall on the French on the east of Rheims. Lawrence saw him at his headquarters at Bombon last Friday and, as a result of their talk, a second British division was moved south of the Somme as a reserve to the left of the French.

“But before Lawrence could get back to G.H.Q., Foch, evidently becoming still more anxious, ordered by cipher wire (about midday Saturday) a first instalment of British reserves to be sent to the Champagne sector. This is to con-

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sist of a corps headquarters and four divisions. Two divisions are leaving to-day and will detrain south-east of Châlons. Foch also asks me to prepare for the dispatch of a second group of four divisions. And all this when there is nothing definite to show that the enemy means to attack in Champagne. Indeed, Prince Rupprecht still retains twenty-five divisions in reserve on the British front.

“But Foch has completely changed his view of the situation and strategical plan. On 1st July he issued ‘Directive Générale No. 4’. In this he stated that Paris and Abbeville were to be covered before anything else. ‘The advance of the enemy must be stopped at all costs in these two directions.

“‘Consequently we must concentrate our force on the front Lens-Château-Thierry.

“‘The allied reserves will be pushed into the battle wherever it takes place.’ French reserves to help the British if they are heavily attacked. ‘De même, les réserves anglaises au profit des armées françaises, si l’ennemi concentre décidément ses masses dans la direction de Paris.’

“And now we are sending our reserves (of which we have very few) right away to the east of France, by Foch’s bidding on Saturday 13th.

“I at once arrange to see Foch as soon as possible in order to find out what has happened to him or his Government. I also write a letter to General Foch in which I set out the position on the British front and end up by saying that ‘I am averse to dispatching any troops to Champagne at the present moment. I adhere to my previous opinion that we ought to be prepared to meet minor operations in Champagne and Flanders to disperse and absorb Allies’ reserves, and subsequently the main blow in the centre, i.e. between Lens and Château-Thierry.’”

Late on the night of the 14th—or strictly speaking at

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12.35 a.m. on the morning of the 15th, the following message was conveyed to Haig by telephone from the Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

“Members of the Imperial War Cabinet have to-night discussed with the Prime Minister the latest orders by General Foch for moving British reserves southwards. As information hitherto has pointed to an attack on your front by Rupprecht’s forces as well as an attack by the Crown Prince on the French, they feel considerable anxiety.

“They wish me to tell you that if you consider the British Army is endangered or if you think that General Foch is not acting solely on military considerations, they rely on the exercise of your judgment under the Beauvais agreement as to the security of the British front after the removal of these troops. General Smuts on behalf of the Imperial War Cabinet will proceed to G.H.Q. to-day Monday to confer with you on your return from Beauvais.”

The curious phrase, “if you think that General Foch is not acting solely on military considerations”, shows how suspicious of their Generalissimo the British Government had grown. Fortunately the personal interview between Haig and Foch which took place on the following day restored complete harmony, as such interviews seldom failed to do.

“Gemeau translates my letter to Foch into French, and about 10 a.m. I leave with Lawrence for Mouchy-le-Châtel. We get there just after 1 o’clock and lunch with Foch, who had sent on a special meal from his headquarters at Bombon for us. Foch was in the best of spirits. He told me that after three hours’ bombardment the enemy had attacked at 4 a.m. this morning on two fronts east and west of Rheims. East of Rheims on a front of 26 miles, and west of Rheims on a front of 29 miles. A front of 16 miles about Rheims itself was not attacked. The total front attacked

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seems therefore to be about 55 miles. East of Rheims the attack was held and the enemy only gained the outpost zone. South-west of Rheims the enemy crossed the Marne, and had advanced three to five miles in places. Château-Thierry was strongly held by Americans, and further eastwards an American division had counter-attacked and driven enemy back into the river, taking 1000 prisoners. So altogether the situation was satisfactory, and a weight was taken off Foch's mind, who feared an attack as far east as Verdun, where he had no reserves. The British four divisions had first of all been ordered to detrain near Châlons; now that the enemy's attack had been defined, the divisions were ordered to detrain further west, at Rouille and Pont sur Seine. I put my case strongly to Foch why I was averse to moving my reserves from my front until I knew that Rupprecht's reserves had been moved to the new battle front. I mentioned that 88 additional heavy batteries had come against the British front from Liége in June. 'Marksmen machine-gun detachments' were still training north-west of Liége; prisoners and deserters stated that an attack on the Lys salient was to be ready mounted by the 18th instant, whilst the front from La Bassée canal to the Somme was ready to receive troops. Some new shelters north-east of Bapaume large enough for 20,000 men had been discovered. All these facts and many others pointed to the intention of the enemy to attack the British front at some time soon.

"Foch agreed with me, but said his first object was to hold up the present attack at all costs as soon as possible. He only wanted my divisions as a reserve in case of necessity and they would be in a position *ready to return to me at once* in case the British front was threatened. Under these circumstances I agreed to send the next two divisions, as arranged. I read my letter to Foch and left him a

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copy, so that he could have my statements on record in writing.

"I got back to Beaurepaire about 7 p.m. General Smuts and Radcliffe arrived from England soon after 8 p.m. After dinner I had a long talk with Smuts. He said the Prime Minister was very anxious. I explained that after Foch's statements to me to-day I considered that the situation was satisfactory, but I must expect to be attacked soon, probably on the Kemmel front, and that the main blow would fall between Lens and Château-Thierry if the enemy did not previously break the French front about Rheims."

While Haig and Foch were both expecting to be attacked, and while both had equally good grounds for their expectations, it was natural that their views should differ as to the most suitable location for such reserves as they had at their disposal. On July 16th Haig wrote:

"Will the enemy go on with his attacks about Rheims, or will he withdraw such of his reserves as are left and add them to Rupprecht's reserves for a blow against the British? Evidence seems to be accumulating of an attack against the Hazebrouck-Ypres front about the 20th. A captured officer under examination stated that his trench mortars had to be in position in the Kemmel sector by the 16th. Another prisoner stated that an attack is to be launched on that front between the 18th and 20th."

So much depended on the answers to these questions. We now know that it was Ludendorff's intention if the attack in Champagne succeeded to deliver the attack in Flanders a fortnight later. But the attack in Champagne failed. It was Foch's brilliant counter-attack that succeeded and began the series of victories which were to end the war.

On July 17th General Du Cane arrived at Haig's headquarters with a letter and a message from Foch. The letter

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asked him for full information with regard to the possibilities of an attack on the British front. The message conveyed the information that Mangin's Army would attack the next morning at 8 a.m. with twenty divisions. Du Cane had been long enough at Foch's headquarters to become the perfect ambassador—that is to say he could not only explain the British point of view to the French, but, what was far more difficult, he could truly represent the French point of view to the British. Foch was not an easy man even for his fellow countrymen to understand. He would conceal his thoughts by the gruff enunciation of platitudes. When asked for an opinion on an important military question he would reply with a phrase, such as "One does what one can", "Never relieve troops during a battle", "There must be no retreat", or something of the sort, not calculated to enlighten the anxious enquirer. He had strong likes and dislikes, and there were good generals in the French Army whom he would not work with. He had received Du Cane ungraciously, but he had come to trust him and his trust had been reciprocated by deep admiration.

Du Cane's mission was to smooth away any difficulties that might arise between the French and English. He found that whenever he could get direct access to the British Commander-in-Chief difficulties vanished. But the time of a Commander-in-Chief is limited and he is closely surrounded. On the occasion of this visit of July 17th a letter had already been prepared for Haig's signature which asked Foch to return to him forthwith the four divisions of the XXII Corps which were at that time serving with the French. Du Cane spoke of the attack which was to be delivered the following morning. G.H.Q. were inclined to be sceptical of his success, but as the result of a long conversation which Du Cane had with Haig after dinner Haig, while signing the letter, told him that he could inform Foch

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that if British troops were wanted to exploit a success they should of course be used.

It was fortunate that Du Cane should have had so friendly a message to deliver when he returned to Foch's headquarters on the morning of July 18th. Before he arrived there the blow had been struck that had definitely marked the turn of the tide. Foch, in whom the spirit of attack was incarnate, had entered into his kingdom at last. The four months' vigil was over. The counter-attack had begun.



## Chapter XXV

# THE BEGINNING OF THE END

It has been seen how Haig had never doubted that if the Germans attacked in the spring of 1918 the Allies would win the war in the autumn of the same year. He expressed that conviction to more than one witness during the darkest days of the March offensive, and it was that conviction alone which had caused him to doubt whether the enemy would be unwise enough to deliver the great attack. As the summer months came on and the French successfully resisted the last German effort at the end of May, Haig's belief grew stronger, and he set himself to the task of planning, stage by stage, the complete defeat of the German Army.

It is easy, therefore, to imagine the mood in which he read a lengthy document drawn up at the end of July by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff and entitled "British Military Policy, 1918-1919". It was dated July 25th, covered over thirty typewritten foolscap pages, and was signed by Henry Wilson. The gist of it was as follows :

The present situation was highly precarious. There was still a possibility of losing the Channel ports, of becoming separated from our French allies, and of the fall of Paris. Our first objective, therefore, should be to improve our position on the western front before winter set in. Our objectives should be limited and our aims defensive. There would follow a lengthy period of preparation during

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which no effort should be made to reach a final decision. "During this period the Germans need have no immediate anxiety as to their military position in France . . . but by March (1919) the balance will begin to swing heavily against them." It was possible, therefore, that they would attempt during the period of preparation to turn the tables by the delivery of "a sudden stroke". The most favourable theatre for such a stroke would appear to be the Italian front. No time should therefore be lost in improving Franco-Italian communications and in despatching three or four British divisions to Italy.

Whether the great allied offensive in the west should be delivered in 1919 or 1920 was gravely discussed, and the decision was eventually reached that the date to work for was July 1st, 1919. Minor offensives, in Palestine during the autumn and Albania in the spring, were recommended. Meanwhile Germany's activities in Asia required careful watching, and it should be part of Great Britain's policy to reconstruct a powerful Russia to serve as a barrier between Germany and India.

"Even when the German armies are soundly beaten in the west", so runs this remarkable document, "and driven out of France and Belgium, it is difficult to see how we could force such terms on the Central Powers as would loosen their hold on the East or close the road to Egypt and India. Unless by the end of the war democratic Russia can be reconstituted as an independent military power it is only a question of time before most of Asia becomes a German colony, and nothing can impede the enemy's progress towards India." The simple fact which the writer of these paragraphs seems not to have appreciated, or to have temporarily forgotten, was that once the German Army was defeated nobody had anything to fear from Germany in any continent until that army was reconstructed.

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On Haig's own copy of this document he scribbled the scornful comment, "Words! Words! Words! lots of words and little else. Theoretical rubbish! Whoever drafted this stuff would never win any campaign." But it must be borne in mind, while reading the history of the months that followed, that these theories possessed the mind of the principal and best-trusted military adviser of the British Government. Haig held a different and a far more optimistic opinion. Already he saw victory within his grasp. The weight of anxiety was beginning to diminish, and there is an entry in his diary on July 20th which is not without significance: "In the afternoon I motored to Le Touquet with Alan Fletcher and played a round of golf on the links. This is the first round I have played in France."

The road to victory, which in Haig's vision grew daily shorter and more direct, still stretched itself for Henry Wilson over a long and tortuous course. He had now reached the height of his ambition, for there is no reason to suppose that he aspired to be Commander-in-Chief, a position for which his experiences as a corps commander must have persuaded him that he was unfitted. His present appointment gave full scope to his talents, but his tenure of it did not enhance his reputation in any direction.

Unfortunately for him his opinions on future strategy remain on record. Fortunately for his country they were not allowed to have any effect on the conduct of the war. His position as a link between Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief was difficult. It was one that no soldier would have envied. But he, who missed no opportunity of expressing his contempt for politicians, was himself far more a politician than a soldier at heart. Faced with the problem of how to be loyal to Lloyd George and Haig at the same time, he solved it by being loyal to neither.

He had, as has already been stated, at one time recom-

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mended that Haig should be dismissed, although Haig himself had no idea of it, and he now suggested that Haig's independence should be further limited, and that he should not even have the right of appeal to his own Government if he received an order which he considered endangered the safety of his troops. The following is Haig's account of the incident. On July 23rd, "Sir H. Wilson arrived from Versailles at 1 o'clock. He saw Foch and Clemenceau yesterday. Both stated that they are very pleased with the situation. I gave back to Wilson a proposed draft of an amended letter of instructions to me as Commander-in-Chief, in France. The change was to the effect that I should proceed to carry out *all* orders received from Foch, even though the safety of the Army should be endangered thereby, and complain afterwards! I pointed out that if an officer was fit to be given the appointment of Commander-in-Chief of the British armies, he ought to be able to use his discretion in a question of this nature. . . . So he decided to leave the instructions as they now are."

But while Wilson was secretly criticising Haig to Lloyd George, he was equally willing to criticise Lloyd George to Haig. On July 26th, the date of the memorandum, he wrote to Haig:

"Having for the last four months tried to get the Prime Minister to realise that the French meant to take us over body and bones, he (the P.M.) now rushes off to the other extreme of suspicion and combativeness and I shall spend the next four months in trying to steady him."

Fortunately soldiers of different nationalities in France co-operated better than soldiers and politicians of the same nationality in England. Foch had realised, as had Haig, that the turning point in the war was already reached, he could appreciate the value of Haig's advice and of the improvements on his own plans that Haig suggested,

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and he had complete confidence in Haig's ability in the field.

In view of the decisive effect which was to be produced by the next attack on the part of the Allies, it is important that the credit for its conception should be justly assigned. On July 12th Foch wrote to Haig that in his opinion the first offensive to be delivered on the British front should be on the line Festubert-Robecq in order to set free the Bruay minefields and threaten the communication centre at Estaires. He enquired whether Haig shared his view, and pressed him to name a date when the attack could be delivered.

Haig, however, had meanwhile thought out a different plan, which he believed to be a better one. On July 16th he explained to Rawlinson, commanding the Fourth Army, what his plan was, because the Fourth Army was to play the principal part in it. "It was my intention," he said, "if the situation became favourable, that the Fourth Army's right should be pushed forward to the river Luce, say near Caix. Thence the lines would run northwards through Harbonnières to Chipilly on the Somme. I proposed to ask Foch to order the French Army on our right to co-operate by an attack advancing north-eastwards on the south of Moreuil, so as to pinch the salient formed by the rivers Luce and Avre between the villages of Caix and Pierrepont."

On the following day, July 17th, he replied to Foch's letter of the 12th. "I see no object", he wrote, "in pushing forward over the flat and wet country between Robecq and Festubert. . . .

". . . The operation which to my mind is of the greatest importance, and which I suggest to you should be carried out as early as possible, is to advance the allied front east and south-east of Amiens so as to disentangle that town

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and the railway line. This can be carried out by a combined French and British operation, the French attacking south of Moreuil and the British north of the river Luce." He went on to explain the operation to Foch as he had explained it to Rawlinson, and to point out exactly the part that he would require the French to play in it.

Foch, in reply, while refusing to abandon his proposal for the Festubert-Robecq offensive, fully endorsed the plan which Haig had suggested.

In the afternoon of July 23rd, Haig drove to Paris and dined that evening with Pershing at the Café Foyot. Pershing informed him that he was quite ready to use the American troops in a big offensive in the autumn and that he had gained his point of forming two American armies immediately, to which the French had formerly been opposed.

The next morning Haig proceeded to visit Foch at his headquarters at Bombon.

"I had a talk with Foch for three-quarters of an hour; Generals Lawrence and Weygand were present. We agreed to proceed with the operations east of Amiens as soon as possible. Rawlinson and Debeney are meeting to-day, if necessary, to co-ordinate their plans. I am to meet Foch on some day soon, the date of which he will notify me. At 10.30 a.m. the main conference assembled:

Foch and Weygand;  
Self and Lawrence;  
Pétain and Buat;  
Pershing and Boyd, and interpreter.

"Weygand read out a memorandum which had been prepared under Foch's direction. Its main clauses dealt with:

"(1) Regaining the initiative and passing to the offensive;

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“(2) Opening certain main lines of railway, so as to prepare for future operations;

“(3) Clearing the enemy away from the vicinity of the Bethune coalmines.

“We all agreed to the general principles laid down for future plans. Pétain raised some questions as to the sufficiency of the means at his disposal, such as ammunition and guns and tanks available.

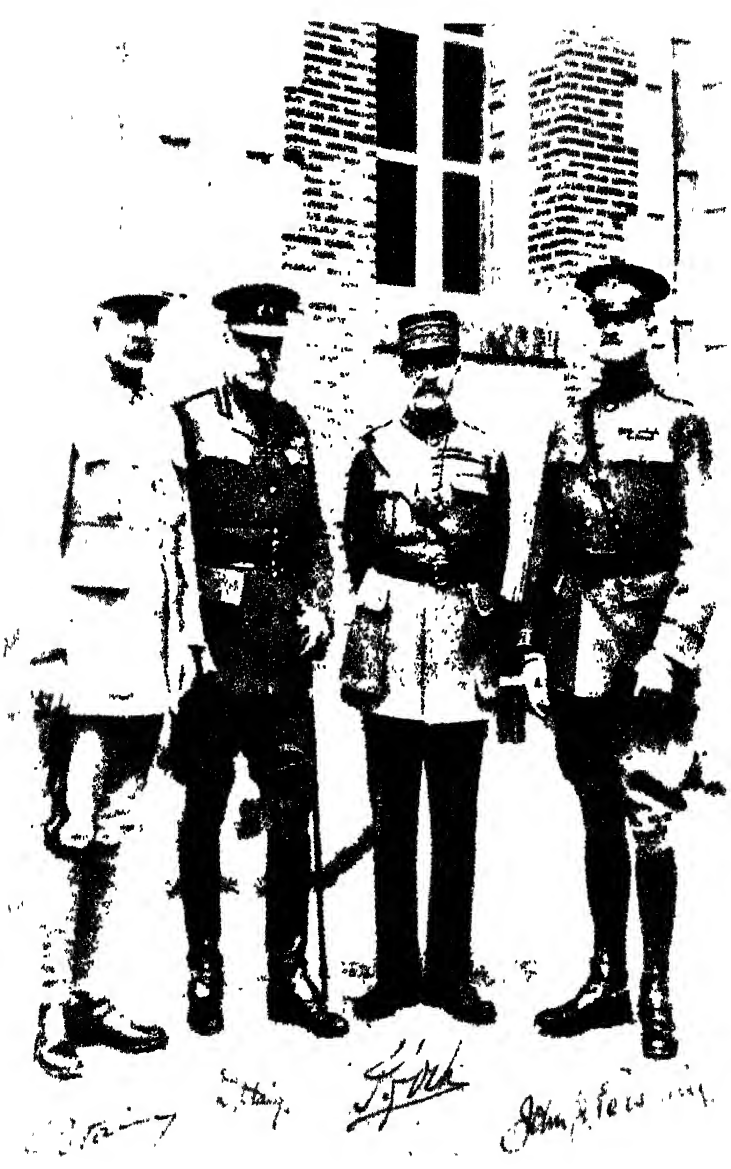
“A list of questions to which General Foch asks for an answer was also circulated to each of us. These questions deal with the forces which each of the Allies can maintain in the field on 1st January and on 1st April next year.

“It was past 12.30 before our conference was over. I then took a short walk in the grounds with General Pétain. He mentioned that General Anthoine had been removed from his appointment of Chief of Staff simply because Foch did not get on with him. Personally I feel that both Pétain and the French Army will feel his absence greatly.

“At lunch I sat on Foch’s right, with Weygand next to me on my right. We were given a magnificent lunch. . . . It was rather wasted on me, and I cannot understand how anyone can work in the afternoon after such a huge meal. The cost of food is now very high—50 francs for a chicken in Paris.

“I was photo’d with Foch, Pétain and Pershing. We got away about 2.30 p.m. and visited Fontainebleau on our way to Paris.

“I had not been there since the summer of 1881 or 1882, when I spent a month of the Oxford long vacation with a Pasteur Brand to learn a little French. . . . The château is now being used as a hospital, but the place looks much the same as when I was last there, only to-day there was no bread to be had with which to feed the carp in the pond.



HAIG, FOCH, PÉTAIN AND PERSHING





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The water looks as dirty as formerly! We got to Paris soon after 6 p.m. and dined quietly in the hotel."

Two days later, July 26th, another conference took place. Sarcus was the place of meeting, and further arrangements were made for the carrying out of the attack by Rawlinson and Debeney which Haig had suggested.

"Debeney proposed to carry out a small operation south of Hangard on the river Luce. But Foch decided on a larger operation on the lines which I had proposed. Rawlinson and Debeney are to meet at 10 a.m. to-morrow to settle details regarding the area of concentration, etc. Rawlinson was very anxious to carry out his operation alone, without French co-operation, but in view of our limited number of divisions I agreed that Debeney should operate on our right. This is also the more desirable in view of the reserves which Foch is moving to the Beauvais area."

On July 28th, "General Weygand arrived from Bombon with a letter from Foch to me. In it he asked me to take command of the French First Army (General Debeney) and combine its action with my Fourth Army in the operations which we are now planning. I said, Yes, and sent Foch a letter of thanks. Foch wishes operations hurried on. I said I will try and gain two days if my XXII Corps can be sent back two days earlier than I asked for on Friday last. This will be arranged. I am pleased that Foch should have entrusted me with the direction of these operations."

In view of the fact that the plan had been Haig's from the first, that he had thought out every detail of it and that British forces were to be mainly responsible for its execution, it is impossible not to admire the modesty with which he records his satisfaction that Foch should have entrusted him with its direction.

On the next day, July 29th, "At noon I received army commanders except Rawlinson, who is preparing for the

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forthcoming operations. I met the army commanders alone with my C.G.S. and had a general talk for an hour and a half. They appreciated the opportunity of being able to state their views to me personally instead of before a number of staff officers as on one of the regular periodical conferences with army commanders and staffs.

"I explained the policy and future plans of the Generalissimo. He intends to keep the initiative, and feels that we Allies have 'turned the corner'. As regards tactics, I called attention to divisions being side by side in the line following different principles and ignoring those laid down in my orders. Corps commanders must be held responsible that these principles are followed by all, and army commanders must be responsible for supervising their corps commanders' methods.

"Then, as to offensive tactics, army commanders must do their utmost to get troops out of the influence of trench methods. We are all agreed on the need for the training of battalion commanders, who in their turn must train their company and platoon commanders. This is really a platoon commanders' war.

"Army commanders lunched with me after the conference. All seemed very pleased with the meeting.

"About 2.30 General Rawlinson came to see me. He has had a meeting with his corps commanders. The date would be advanced two days, as requested by me. All his arrangements were being pushed forward satisfactorily. His relations have been most cordial with Debeney since our meeting at Sarcus with Foch last Friday."

The month of August, that was to prove so fateful in the history of the war, brought with it in the year 1918 an almost uninterrupted series of perfect summer days. The nights were cold and the early mornings were often accompanied by thick mists which, as has already been seen,

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are more favourable to the attackers than the attacked. Had such weather attended the operations of the previous year the history of the battle of Passchendaele would have been very different.

Now a new spirit began to animate all ranks within the lines of the allied armies. Preparations were going busily forward for the next offensive and they were being conducted with cheerful confidence that was continually stimulated by reports of prisoners concerning the dejected state of the enemy.

Relations between the Allies were excellent. Clemenceau wrote to Haig on July 3 1st, in reply to an invitation:

“My dear Field Marshal,

I was well aware that you were the most amiable man in the world but I really didn't think you capable of showering all at once so many flattering attentions on a modest creature like myself. Since however good fortune has decided that you should be so kind as to select me as the object of your favours what can I do but tell you how deeply I am touched? I should have paid you a visit a long time ago if I hadn't been stopped by the fear of displeasing certain people. Your invitation breaks the spell and I propose to come and see you as soon as possible in company with Lord Derby who has kindly consented to accompany me. It will be indeed a great pleasure for me, for it will give me the opportunity of telling one of the finest soldiers of this war what the French people think of him.

Yours very cordially,

G. Clemenceau.”

On August 3rd he had a satisfactory interview with the Generalissimo. “Foch was anxious that our operations should begin as soon as possible, because the enemy is falling back from the Marne very quickly. French forces are

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already over the Vesle and Ardre and soon will have the heights overlooking the Aisne. I told Foch the date on which we would be ready, and he was pleased that all had been done to be ready so soon.

"As regards the objective, Foch wished it to be some place south of Chaulnes. I pointed out that I had given Ham in my orders, 15 miles beyond Chaulnes and across the river Somme. This he thought satisfactory.

"He was anxious that there should be no delay on the line Mericourt-Caix. I told him that I had ordered that line to be captured and prepared for defence. If we hold that line we disengage Amiens, and we must be prepared to meet a counter-attack. But that does not mean that the advance on Chaulnes is to be delayed until the line in question is consolidated. The advance on Chaulnes and Roye will be carried out as soon as the necessary fresh troops can move forward. This will be as quickly as possible.

"We discussed a few points regarding the Americans, and Foch proposed to see Pershing and urge him to form an American Corps Staff as soon as possible under my orders, and to authorise me to put the American divisions into battle when I thought fit. He will also arrange to have a meeting between Pershing, himself and me.

"We then had lunch. Foch was in very good form. After lunch he and I took a short walk in the grounds. More than once he expressed the opinion that the 'Germans are breaking up', and was anxious lest they should fall back before I could get my blow in."

On August 4th, the fourth anniversary of the declaration of war, a special service of thanksgiving was held at Montreuil which Haig attended. His favourite preacher, the Reverend George Duncan, officiated, as representing the Church of Scotland, while the Reverend J. N. Bateman-Champain represented the Church of England. Haig had

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been most anxious that all denominations should be present. "The Roman Catholic priests however were not allowed by their regulations to take part in the ceremony but many Roman Catholic officers attended. A hollow square was formed of British officers and clerks of G.H.Q. as well as of the battalions finding the guards (the Guernsey Militia), W.A.A.C. and a large number of French officers and a few Americans. The service was very impressive and was much appreciated."

On the following morning, "I saw Colonel Butler at 8.30 a.m. Situation unchanged and at 8.45 I left with General Lawrence for Flixecourt (headquarters Fourth Army), where I had a conference with General Debeney, General Rawlinson and General Kavanagh (commanding Cavalry Corps).

"I thought that the Fourth Army orders aimed too much at getting a final objective on the old Amiens defence line, and stopping counter-attacks on it. This is not far enough, in my opinion, if we succeed at the start in surprising the enemy. So I told Rawlinson (it had already been in my orders) to arrange to advance as rapidly as possible and capture the old Amiens line of defence (Mericourt-Caix, etc.), and to put it in a state of defence; but not to delay; at once reserves must be pushed on to capture the line Chaulnes-Roye. The general direction of the advance is to be on Ham. As regards the cavalry, Rawlinson had only arranged for cavalry to pass on the south of a line Villers-Bretonneux and Harbonnières. I said that the cavalry must keep in touch with the battle and be prepared to pass through anywhere between the river Somme and the Roye-Amiens road. Also that a cavalry brigade with a battery, R.H.A. and some whippet tanks are to be placed under General Monash's orders, commanding Australian Corps, for pursuit and to reap the fruits if we succeed.

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“Debeney explained his plans in detail. On Friday morning he is to launch an attack from south of Montdidier to join up with our units in the direction of Roye. Debeney said how proud he was to serve under me, and how he intended to do his utmost, etc.

“On leaving Fourth Army headquarters I visited headquarters Australian Corps at Bertangles Château, and explained my views on the situation and my plan. Monash had already heard from Rawlinson that a force of cavalry was to be placed under his orders, and was working out his plan for getting them forward and pushing them through if the enemy’s front is broken.

“At Villers-Bocage (headquarters III Corps) I had a talk with General Butler. He has been very seedy as the result of flu. He could not sleep until three nights ago, but lay down in his blankets on the floor of his hut. He went to sleep at once, and is now quite recovered. I discussed his whole plan of attack. He seemed full of confidence of his success.

“I lunched by the roadside on leaving Villers-Bocage and then went on to Mollins (headquarters American 33rd Division). General Bell, commanding the division, was expecting me, and had a guard of honour paraded to receive me. Bell looks a typical ‘Yankee’ with a little goatee beard, and moustache. He was very pleased with the way the English had looked after him and his division, and with our equipment. The Americans had not treated him so well. His two brigadiers were present. One, newly appointed, had just come from the Marne battle.

“On going away we were photographed and cinema’d much to Bell’s delight. Bell seemed a capital fellow, and is distressed that General Pershing won’t let him take part in our offensive battle.”

On August 7th the King came to luncheon at Haig’s headquarters. The President of the French Republic was

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also present. It was a suitable date for such a reunion. When his troops had been fighting with their backs to the wall the King had been with them. Now when they were about to begin the advance that was to end on the Rhine he was once more at their side.

That afternoon Haig again visited Flixecourt:

“Where I had a talk with General Rawlinson. Everything is going on without a hitch and the enemy seems in ignorance of the impending blow. I then went on to headquarters Canadian Corps at Dury and saw General Currie commanding the corps. The latter said ‘it had been a hustle to be ready in time, but everything had been got in except two long-range guns’. The platforms were ready for them and they would be got in by to-night. Last night was our most critical moment. If the Germans had bombarded the Canadian zone, we could not have retaliated last night. To-night the situation is quite different, and we are ready.”

Not only was all in readiness but two of the conditions most essential to victory were present. Secrecy had been maintained and the heart of the troops was sound. On the morrow the Germans experienced “the most complete surprise of the war”;<sup>1</sup> and of the British forces, whom less than four months divided from the terrible experiences of the spring, it was written by one best qualified to know that: “Nothing on August 7th was more remarkable than the spirit and supreme confidence of all the troops, to whatever army they belonged. It may be said without exaggeration that so strong was this feeling, so high the morale and so fixed the determination to reach the furthest objectives at whatever cost, that the Battle of Amiens was really won before the attack began.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*A History of the World War*, by Captain Liddell Hart, p. 545.

<sup>2</sup>*The Fourth Army*, by Field-Marshal Sir Archibald Montgomery-Massingbird, p. 30.



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This is not the place to tell the story of that battle. How in the darkness of the hour before dawn—darkness that was increased by a heavy mist—456 tanks began to creep over the broken ground that divided them from the enemy—how following close upon them the impetuous advance of the Australians and Canadians burst into the enemy's trenches with the first streaks of morning light and sweeping all before them stormed on to their objectives, so that the battle was won before the sun pierced through the mist at ten o'clock.

The Commander-in-Chief is spared the physical agony of the trenches. Only in imagination can he suffer the sickening anxiety of the hour before zero, the deadening fatigue of the long day's fighting, and the scorching pain of wounds. But to him also is denied the glory of battle, the thrill of the race across no man's land, the sudden carelessness of life that comes as a revelation, and the heart-filling triumph of standing on the captured position and witnessing the flight of the foe. These emotions are but dimly reflected in the mind of the commander as he sits by the telephone or reads the messages which reach him from hour to hour.

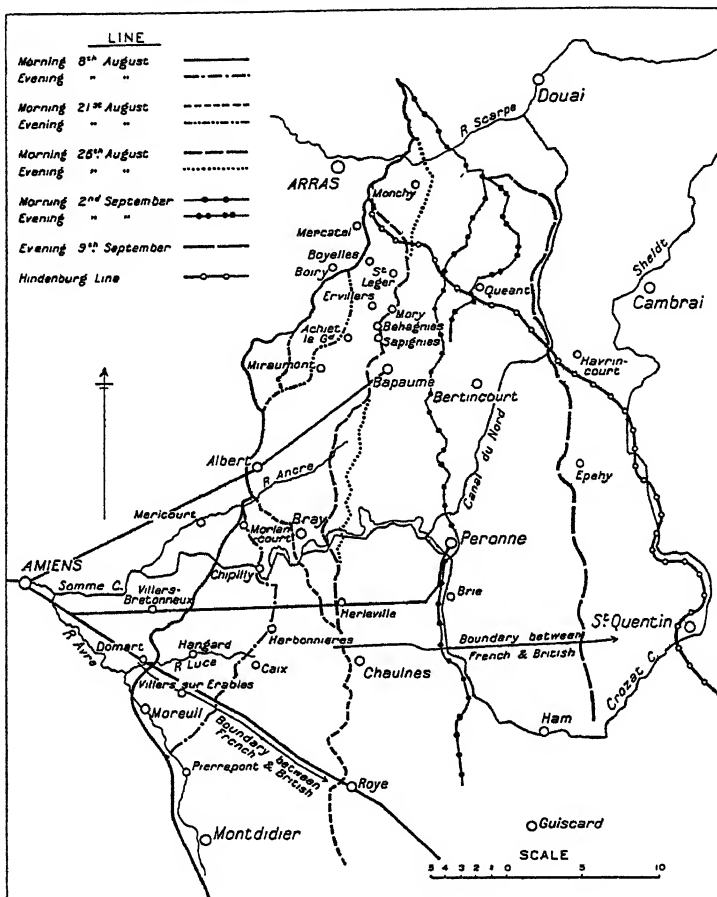
*“Thursday, 8th August, 1918. Glass steady. Fine night and morning—slight mist in valley. An autumn feel in the morning air.*

*“7 a.m. Fourth Army reported generally quiet night until zero, 4.30 a.m. We attacked from southern boundary (south of Domart-en-Luce) to Morlancourt (near Ancre) in conjunction with French on right. Attack apparently complete surprise and is progressing satisfactorily.*

*“Situation normal on rest of front, except on Fifth Army where enemy has fallen back about 1000 yards in depth on a front of  $4\frac{1}{2}$  miles. I have ordered enemy to be followed with strong advance guards but to hold our present positions as main line of defence.*



OPENING OF FINAL BRITISH OFFENSIVE  
8<sup>th</sup> AUGUST - 9<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER, 1918



MAP 8

## THE BEGINNING OF THE END

"11.30 a.m. I heard that 1st Cavalry Division had taken and passed Harbonnières, and that our 3rd Cavalry Division was on line Caix-Beaucourt. French are at Villers-sur-Erables. I sent off Commandant Gemeau at once to General Debeney to tell him of the situation and to ask him to send forward all his mounted troops to operate on the right of the British cavalry and extend the break in the enemy's front southwards by operating in rear of the Germans holding the Montdidier front. Gemeau saw Debeney, but the latter had many reasons why his cavalry could not get through earlier than to-morrow forenoon at the soonest. First, his cavalry was not near enough, and secondly, the French infantry covered all the roads.

"Soon after 12 noon I motored to Flixecourt with General Davidson and saw Sir H. Rawlinson. Some hard fighting was then going on near Morlancourt (north of the Somme). But Butler, commanding III Corps, was fully alive to the situation and had an adequate number of troops to deal with it.

"Everywhere else the situation had developed more favourably for us than I, optimist though I am, had dared to hope. The enemy was completely surprised, two reliefs of divisions were in progress, very little resistance was offered, and our troops got their objectives quickly with very little loss.

"I told Rawlinson to continue the work on the orders which I had already given, namely, to organise his left strongly; if opportunity offers to advance to line Albert-Bray. With his left strongly held, he will push his defensive front out to line Chaulnes-Roye. Reconnaissance to be pushed forward to the Somme river, whilst his main effort is directed south-eastwards on Roye to help the French. The cavalry should work on the outer flank of the infantry and move on Chaulnes-Roye as soon as possible.

## THE BEGINNING OF THE END

"I returned to my train for lunch, and about 4 p.m. I called on headquarters French First Army at Conty. I told Debeney that the British advance would automatically clear his front. Meantime, to do his utmost to join hands with the British at Roye; his cavalry should be sent forward as soon as possible to operate on the right of the British who had already pierced the German line of defence.

"At 6 p.m. Marshal Foch came to see me. He is very delighted at our success to-day, and fully concurred in all the arrangements I had made for continuing the battle. His headquarters are at Sarcus to-night.

"Situation reports at 4.30 p.m. stated Canadian Corps had captured Beaucourt, Caix and the Amiens outer defence line east of Caix. Cavalry Corps south and east of Caix; Canadians in touch with French at Maison Blanche. Australians on final objective all along their front. III Corps on ridges north-east of Chipilly.

"Enemy blowing dumps in all directions and streaming eastwards. Their transport and limbers offer splendid targets for our aeroplanes."

The victory which, as Haig himself admitted, had exceeded even his most optimistic forecasts, was continued and completed during the two following days. Satisfied as he was with it for the moment his satisfaction would have been increased an hundredfold had he been fully aware of the impression it had produced on the enemy. "August 8th", wrote Ludendorff, "was the black day of the German Army in the war. . . . It marked the decline of our fighting power, and, the man-power situation being what it was, it robbed me of the hope of discovering some strategic expedient that might once more stabilise the position in our favour. . . . The war would have to be ended." These words mean nothing less than this: as the outcome of that day's fighting, the man who was responsible for the fate of the

## THE BEGINNING OF THE END

German Army recognised defeat. For this result the gratitude of the British Empire and of the Allies is due to the men of the Fourth Army, to Rawlinson and his staff, and to Haig the Commander-in-Chief, who planned the attack and who persuaded Foch to approve it.

The question now to be decided by the Allies was when and where the next blow was to be delivered. Upon one point Haig and Foch were in complete agreement—no time was to be wasted, no breathing space was to be accorded to the enemy. Foch was in favour of continuing to hammer where the dent had already been made. On August 10th:

“General Foch came to see me at 11 a.m. He wishes the advance to continue to the line Noyon-Ham-Péronne, and to try to get the bridgeheads on the Somme. I pointed out the difficulty of the undertaking unless the enemy is quite demoralised, and we can cross the Somme on his heels. At the same time I outlined my proposals for advancing our front on Aubers ridge and so freeing the Béthune coal mines, together with movements against Bapaume and Monchy le Preux.

“Foch agreed, but said, ‘you will be able to carry out the Aubers Ridge plan, all the same’.

“I agree, if the enemy’s opposition on the present battle-front is not stiffening. In any case, we must expect German reserves to arrive very soon in order to check our advance. My plan to advance my left on Bapaume and on Monchy-le-Preux will then become necessary. In Foch’s opinion the fact of the French First Army’s and now the Third French Army’s getting on without meeting with serious opposition shows the enemy is demoralised. I agree that some German divisions are demoralised, but not all yet!

“I accordingly issued orders to continue the advance on Guiscard-Ham-Péronne, and occupy passages of the river

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below Ham. I also ordered General Byng (Third Army) to raid, and if situation favourable to push forward at once strong advance guards to Bapaume."

Haig's expectation that resistance would grow more stubborn on the front already attacked proved correct. Such a development was bound to follow according to the teachings of military science, and according to the laws of common sense. If a man wishing to reach the bottom of a box that is full of cotton wool drives his fist into it he will find that with every blow the resistance of the cotton wool increases until it forms a pad upon which his fist can make no further impression. It is the same with a purely frontal attack delivered against a large army with strong reinforcements.

That same evening Haig obtained confirmation of his views.

"At the railway station east of Le Quesnel I visited the headquarters of our 32nd Division, which had relieved the 3rd Canadians in the early morning. I met General Lambert (commanding division). He had just returned from visiting the brigades at the front. His opinion was that the enemy's opposition had stiffened up. There were many hostile machine guns, much intact wire and the old battle-field ground between the German and French lines with numerous holes favoured delaying tactics and prevented the action of our cavalry. He had therefore decided to stop the attack till to-morrow morning, when he would put in his remaining brigade, which was fresh, with all available tanks."

The next day, August 11th, Haig saw General Byng, commanding the Third Army, and told him to be ready to put in an attack. "The objective of the attack will be to break the enemy's front, in order to outflank the enemy's present battle front. The direction of the advance will be Bapaume."

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Haig during these days was living in a train at Wiry, and it was there that late that night Foch paid him another visit.

"About 10 p.m. Marshal Foch came to see me with Weygand and Desticker. After a talk, he approved (in view of the increased opposition) of my reducing my front of attack, and aiming at reaching the Somme on the front Brie-Ham (exclusively), instead of Péronne-Ham. The French Third Army had made good progress, as the enemy did not expect an attack in that quarter. He asked me to attack with my Third Army. I told him that three weeks ago I had discussed with Byng the possibility of the Third Army co-operating and to-day I had seen Byng and given him definite orders to advance as soon as possible on Bapaume."

On the following afternoon Haig had a further conversation with Byng, explaining his plan in greater detail. Instead of continuing to batter his head against the now hardened resistance in front of the Fourth Army he aimed at breaking the enemy's front further north, thus threatening the flank of the forces opposing the Fourth Army and compelling them to retire in order to protect themselves and to conform with the remainder of the line.

Foch, while appreciating the design of Haig's strategy, was anxious to combine brute force with subtlety, to make use at the same time both of the rapier and the bludgeon. While therefore approving of the proposed attack by the Third Army he wanted the Fourth Army and his own First Army to continue to hammer on the dent. Haig was uncertain whether this policy was wise, and the first to protest against it was General Debeney. On the 13th he sent a message to the effect that "He wished to postpone the attack 24 hours (i.e. until the morning of the 16th) because the enemy is now in a strong position covered with much wire—the old German defensive position of 1916. Also



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there had been some delay in getting up his ammunition. I agreed to the postponement desired.

“Soon after I heard that the Fourth Army commander considered that the attack would be very costly. I sent word to say that if he had any views to express to come and see me in the morning.”

At 10 a.m. accordingly, on the morning of the 14th, Rawlinson arrived “and brought photos showing the state of the enemy’s defences on the front Roye-Chaulnes. He also showed me a letter which he had received from General Currie commanding the Canadian Corps stating that ‘to capture the position in question would be a very costly matter’. He (Currie) ‘was opposed to attempting it’.

“I accordingly ordered the date of this attack to be postponed, but preparations to be continued with vigour combined with wire cutting and counter-battery work.”

The same day he wrote to Foch:

“My dear Marshal,

“14th August, 1918.

During the past 48 hours, the enemy artillery fire on the fronts of the British Fourth and French First Army has greatly increased and it is evident that the line Chaulnes-Roye is strongly held, while photographs show that the line is in good order and well wired. Moreover, the ground is broken and difficult for tanks to operate. It is probable that there are at least sixteen German divisions holding the front south of the Somme opposite to the armies under my command.

“Under these circumstances, I have directed that the attack be postponed until adequate artillery preparation has been carried out in order to prepare a deliberate attack on the position. This might be carried out in conjunction with the attack from my Third Army front, which is being prepared as rapidly as possible. Yours very truly D. Haig.”



HAIG CONGRATULATING CANADIAN TROOPS AFTER  
THE BATTLE OF AMIENS, AUGUST 1918



## THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Foch immediately replied by telegram that he saw "no necessity for delay Fourth Army and First French Army attack . . . which should be carried out as soon as possible".

But Haig, who was never careless of the lives of his men, refused to order an attack in which neither he nor his subordinate generals had any confidence. He therefore wrote in reply to Foch's telegram that nothing had happened since he came to the decision communicated in his previous letter to cause him to alter his opinion on the situation on the Roye-Chaulnes front. "I therefore", he wrote, "much regret that I cannot alter my orders to the two armies in question."

He followed up his letter with a visit to Foch on the 15th. That such differences of opinion should arise were inevitable, but Haig knew that soldiers can settle such matters more easily at a personal interview than by the exchange of notes.

"I visited Foch at Sarcus at 3 p.m.; General Lawrence accompanied me, and Generals Weygand and Du Cane were present at the meeting.

"Foch had pressed me to attack the positions held by the enemy in the front Chaulnes-Roye. I declined to do so because they could only be taken after heavy casualties in men and tanks. I had ordered the French First and British Fourth Armies to postpone their attack, but to keep up pressure on that front so as to make the enemy expect an attack there, whilst I transferred my reserves to my Third Army, and also prepared to attack with the First Army on the front Monchy-le-Preux-Miramont. Foch now wanted to know what orders I had issued for attack? when I proposed to attack? where? and with what troops?

"In the course of our talk, Foch admitted that the French First Army was short of ammunition and could not continue counter-battery work for more than one day longer. So the attack must either go in to-morrow or be abandoned.

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"I told Foch of my instructions to Byng and Horne; and that Rawlinson would also co-operate with his left between the Somme and Ancre, when my Third Army had advanced, and when by reason of this some of the hostile pressure (which was still strong on that sector) had lessened.

"I spoke to Foch quite straightly and let him understand that I was responsible to my Government and fellow citizens for the handling of the British forces. Foch's attitude at once changed, and he said all he wanted was early information of my intentions so that he might co-ordinate the operations of the other armies, and that he now thought I was quite correct in my decision not to attack the enemy in his prepared position. But, notwithstanding what he now said, Foch and all his staff had been most insistent for the last five days that I should press on along the south bank and capture the Somme bridges above Péronne, regardless of German opposition and British losses."

During the days that divided the two principal attacks of August, the 8th and the 21st, Haig was never idle. When more important work did not claim his attention he missed no opportunity of visiting the troops which had taken part in the fighting in order to congratulate them, and those which were about to take part in order to make sure that nothing was lacking that could ensure their success. The former were triumphant, the latter were confident, and all were delighted by a visit from their Commander-in-Chief.

One day he visited the Canadian Cavalry Brigade. "I rode round most of the squadrons, horse artillery batteries and machine guns. Fine plucky fellows all, who don't know what fear is—80 per cent are Scotsmen! One young fellow, born in Edinburgh, now a major (by name Strachan) got the V.C. at Cambrai. Was before the war ranching in Alberta. Most are from Winnipeg."

On another occasion he received a reminder of the

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darkest hour of 1914. "I motored on to the neighbourhood of Marcelcave and inspected some units of the 4th Tank Brigade under the command of Brigadier-General Hankey, late of the Worcester regiment. It was he who launched the counter-attack against Gheluvelt on 31st October 1914. A fine, bold officer, he did very well on the 8th, especially in carrying out the crossings of the river Luce at Domart and Thennes."

A few days later he was deeply grieved to learn of the death of George Black, who had been badly wounded in action with the tanks. "He was with me from April 1915 until the beginning of this year in charge of the 17th Lancers troop, my mounted escort. He insisted on going to the Tank Corps as 'he wanted to fight'. He is a great loss to me and all of us. Always so cheerful and happy even when things looked darkest."

On August 18th Haig gave a luncheon party at Amiens which Clemenceau attended. Lord Derby was with him. Foch, Rawlinson and Debeney were also present.

"During lunch M. Clemenceau told me that on the recommendation of Marshal Foch the French Government had decided to present me with the Military Medal, and he pinned it on my coat in the drawing room after lunch. The Military Medal is the highest award which can be given to an officer, only very few receive it. It is the same medal as that given to privates."

After luncheon there was a drive through the recently recaptured territory. "M. Clemenceau inspected the 7th Canadian Brigade on the ground which they had won. Then they filed past by fours. The men looked splendid and the officers looked up to their work in every way. M. Clemenceau then left for Paris. He said he had thoroughly enjoyed his visit, and congratulated us on all that we had accomplished."

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On the 19th Haig had an important conversation with Byng.

"He explained his plan, which I thought was too limited in its scope.

"I told him that his objective was to break the enemy's front, and gain Bapaume as soon as possible. Rawlinson will operate between Byng's right and the Somme in the direction of Péronne. His right is therefore well protected: at the same time a force of three divisions of the First Army would be concentrated in rear of Byng's left, and will be available either to develop Byng's operation north-eastward towards Monchy-le-Preux and Quéant (in this case under Byng's orders) or to break the front east of Arras and capture Orange Hill (this operation would be under Horne's orders). At present there are signs that the enemy is withdrawing on the south of the Scarpe from Orange Hill.

"Byng had only arranged to use about a brigade of cavalry. I told him that the Cavalry Corps is now 100 per cent better than it was at Cambrai. He must use the cavalry to the fullest possible extent. Now is the time to act with boldness, and in full confidence that, if we only hit the enemy hard enough, and combine the action of all arms in pressing him, his troops will give way on a very wide front and acknowledge that he is beaten."

On the next day, the 20th, the eve of the attack, Haig visited the headquarters of no less than seven divisions who were to take part in the fighting on the morrow. "The G.O.C. of each division explained to me the details of his plan. All are most confident. I am told that the enemy divisions on this part of our front are of very poor quality, and do not fight at all when we raid their trenches; on the other hand, our fellows are now on the top of their form as a result of our successes. . . . I came away feeling confident that our troops will reach their objectives."

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Haig's confidence was not misplaced. On the following morning, when the Third Army attacked, a heavy mist once more covered the ground and caused a certain amount of confusion in their movements. But the enemy were in no mood for fighting and in many places where the advancing troops expected to meet with stiff resistance they found empty trenches. It was nearly midday before the sun came through, but when it did it found the British forces occupying the greater part of their objectives.

That day Haig entertained Winston Churchill at luncheon. He was now Minister of Munitions.

"He is most anxious to help us in every way, and is hurrying up the supply of '10-calibre-head' shells, gas, tanks, etc. His schemes are all timed for completion in next June. I told him we ought to do our utmost to get a decision this autumn. We are engaged in a 'wearing-out battle', and are outlasting and beating the enemy. If we allow the enemy a period of quiet, he will recover, and the 'wearing-out' process must be recommenced. In reply, I was told that the General Staff in London calculate that the decisive period of the war cannot arrive until next July."

At 10.30 that evening Haig learnt that Byng had decided not to continue operations on the morrow. "Troops had suffered much from the heat and were in disorder. Guns too had to be advanced. I expressed the *wish* that the attack should be resumed at the earliest possible moment. The enemy's troops must be suffering more than ours, because we are elated by success while the enemy is feeling that this is the beginning of the end for him."

The next day was one of broiling heat. Haig's view that Byng was wrong to call a halt was shared by some of the troops in the Third Army, who lay on the battered territory that they had captured the day before, exposed to the continuous shell fire of the enemy and the rays of the August sun.



## THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Haig finally issued an order "directing the offensive to be resumed at the earliest possible moment". The attack accordingly took place before dawn on the following morning, the movements of the troops being assisted by the light of a full moon.

"Attacks were launched by us this morning between Herleville (inclusive) and the Somme; S.E. and E. of Albert and between the river Ancre and Mercatel.

"Hard fighting took place; the enemy's losses were most severe, and our troops made considerable progress. The villages of Boiry, Boyelles, Ervillers, Achiet-le-Grand and Bihucourt were captured. We are pushing on towards St. Lever and Méry, and our advanced guards are on the eastern outskirts of Behagnies and Sapignies. How different are the conditions to-day to those of the Somme Battle of 1916, when the enemy was organised and we had to advance across this very same country.

". . . This afternoon I visited headquarters Third Army and saw General Byng. He is very pleased with the results of to-day after yesterday's halt, and thinks he did right to wait for a day."

On the 22nd Haig had a meeting with Foch "who was in excellent spirits. He was anxious to know what my plans were, and to ascertain whether I viewed the situation in the same way as he did. I explained in detail my objectives. He was quite pleased. He told me how the French Tenth Army (Mangin) was pressing on. . . . Foch's strategy is a simple straightforward advance by all troops on the western front and to keep the enemy on the move. To-night I issued a note to army commanders asking them to bring to the notice of all subordinate leaders the changed conditions under which operations are now being carried out. 'It is no longer necessary to advance step by step in regular lines as in the 1916-1917 battles. All units must go straight for their objectives,

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while reserves should be pushed in where we are gaining ground.'”

During the remainder of the month of August the triumphant advance of the Third and Fourth Armies continued. Every day brought tidings of victory, every hour brought new tasks for the Commander-in-Chief, decisions to be taken, advice to be given, positions to be inspected. Daily he visited his army commanders, explaining to each what was required of him, listening to requests, granting them wherever possible, enquiring into details and outlining future strategy on the broadest lines.

Every hour of those long summer days was full. After visiting half a dozen divisional headquarters in succession he writes: “To each one I explained my plan of action. They were all very delighted. Their divisions are soon going into action and it makes such a difference in the way they fight if leaders know the object and scope of operations.”

The following passage is also typical. “I learnt from General Matheson that the 4th Division was making a very long march to-night. Some had fifteen miles, others twenty miles to do. I was annoyed at this, because I wanted the divisions to be fresh for battle, and arranged that some lorries should be sent to help the men on the march and to carry their packs.”

There has come into existence a legend, the origin of which it is difficult to trace, that the series of British victories in 1918 were planned by the French Generalissimo and could not have been carried out unless he had been in possession of the powers conferred upon him under the system known as “unity of command”. That such a legend should be believed in France is not surprising, but why it should persist in Great Britain is difficult to explain.

It has been shown how the attack by the Fourth Army

## THE BEGINNING OF THE END

on August 8th was of Haig's conception, how he had persuaded Foch to accept it as an alteration to the Festubert-Robecq plan which the Generalissimo had himself suggested, how when he believed that the attack had been carried far enough he had successfully resisted the desire of Foch to continue it, and how he had followed it up by the attack of the Third Army on August 21st with the most brilliant and far-reaching results. From now onward until the end of the war it was the mind of Haig, and not the mind of Foch, that directed the successive battles on the British front where, as shown in the annexed diagram, the bulk of the German Army was concentrated, and drove that Army back, step by step, until it was compelled to surrender. Every move in that magnificent campaign had been thought out beforehand in Haig's council chamber with the assistance of his staff.<sup>1</sup>

Foch himself was frank and generous in his admiration for what was being accomplished. He authorised Du Cane to inform Haig that in his opinion the operations of the British Army during these weeks would serve as a model for all time. He wrote to Haig:

"My dear Field Marshal,

Your affairs are going on very well; I can only applaud the resolute manner in which you follow them up, without giving the enemy a respite and always extending the breadth of your operations. It is this increasing breadth of the offensive—an offensive fed from behind and strongly pushed forward on to carefully selected objectives, without bothering about the alignment nor about keeping too closely in touch—which will produce the greatest results

<sup>1</sup>In the *Times* annual "Review of the Year" published on January 1, 1919, five columns are devoted to the last stages of "The War on Land". The name of Haig is mentioned only once and then in connection with the retreat in March and April.

## THE BEGINNING OF THE END

with the smallest casualties, as you have perfectly understood.”

On August 29th the two met and found themselves in complete agreement. Haig had already written his views to Foch, who not only accepted them but slightly modified his own plans in accordance with Haig's suggestions.

Ever present in Haig's vision there loomed the vast obstacle of the Hindenburg line, the strongest defensive position ever constructed. Monchy-le-Preux, strongly fortified, fell at the cost of only fifteen hundred casualties, Bapaume fell, Péronne fell, and the retreating enemy streamed back to the shelter of the Hindenburg line behind which they thought to find safety as behind an impregnable barrier. But Haig was determined to smash that barrier. He believed he could do it before autumn turned to winter, and he knew that when he had done it he would have won the war.

## Chapter XXVI

### VICTORY

**T**he final stage of the war was now approaching and gradually generals and statesmen of the allied nations were beginning to accept the view which Haig had formed and expressed six months earlier, that the end was in sight.

Of the many great qualities that Foch displayed during his tenure of the supreme command none deserves greater recognition or has received less than his willingness to be guided by the advice of his subordinate, the British Commander-in-Chief. Never was that advice of greater importance than at the end of August and the beginning of September in the final year.

The American Army was now in a position to take the field as an independent force, and at no time since the declaration of 1776 had the United States been more wedded to the principles of independence. As their first objective they had had assigned to them the district of St. Mihiel where, as will be seen from the map, the German front line protruded in an ugly salient. It was the plan of the Generalissimo that the American Army, having fulfilled this task, should press on from St. Mihiel in a north-easterly direction to capture the Briey coalfields and the town of Metz. Foch had been a student at Metz when its incorporation in the German Empire had been proclaimed in 1871, so that the reconquest of it meant much to him. The plans of the

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American Staff had been carefully prepared with Briey and Metz as their objectives.

But Haig was now determined to undertake the tremendous task of assaulting the Hindenburg line. While he was confident of his ability to succeed, he realised that success would demand the concentration of all the resources of the Allies. To launch at such a moment a divergent attack in a north-easterly direction appeared to him to be a serious error, and he therefore made strong representations to the Generalissimo to alter the direction of this offensive, and to request the Americans to proceed north-west from St. Mihiel in the direction of Mézières. In this way their advance would converge with his own, and, by threatening the railway line which runs from Mézières to Maubeuge, and thence through Mons to Liège, would endanger the retreat of German troops south of the Ardennes forest.

In the words of Foch's biographer: "Foch lent his ear the more readily to Haig's argument because it accorded with his own predisposition and the enlargement of his horizon. He had now begun to feel" (what Haig had felt and had said for so long) "that the war might be finished in 1918 instead of 1919."<sup>1</sup>

Foch therefore accepted Haig's advice and, although he had some difficulty in persuading Pershing to accept it also, he eventually succeeded. Once again, therefore, the opinion of Haig prevailed and the great advance proceeded in accordance with the plans that Haig had so carefully prepared. It was satisfactory for him to be aware that he possessed the complete confidence of the Generalissimo, now, when he was about to undertake the greatest task of the whole war, the assault upon that line of fortifications, which many good judges believed to be impregnable.

<sup>1</sup>*Foch, the Man of Orleans*, by B. H. Liddell Hart, p. 356.

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But if Foch trusted him there were others who did not. On the 1st of September he received the following telegram from Henry Wilson. It was headed "Personal"—and ran: "Just a word of caution in regard to incurring heavy losses in attacks on Hindenburg line as opposed to losses when driving the enemy back to that line. I do not mean to say that you have incurred such losses but I know the War Cabinet would become anxious if we received heavy punishment in attacking the Hindenburg line without success."

The meaning of the message was obvious. During the last three weeks Haig had scored a series of victories on a scale unprecedented in the history of the war. No word of thanks, no telegram of congratulations had reached him from his own Government. Now he was preparing to undertake an even greater task, and all the encouragement that he received from the Government was a warning that should he fail he would be called upon to give a strict account for every drop of blood that had been shed in vain. If all went well the Government would claim the credit, if aught went ill the Commander-in-Chief must bear the blame. The Carthaginians used to crucify an unsuccessful general, but it is not recorded of them that they would send their generals reminders on the eve of battle of the penalties that awaited them in defeat.

It was General Davidson who brought the message to the Commander-in-Chief. He had already shown it to General Lawrence and they had both understood its full significance. He remained standing while Haig read it and half expected some sign of indignation or disgust. But when Haig had carefully perused it he laid it aside without a word and raising his eyes calmly enquired what the devil Davidson was waiting for. He would not allow such tactics to alter his plans or disturb his equanimity.

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Haig wrote to Wilson the same day:

“My dear Henry,

With reference to your wire re casualties in attacking the Hindenburg line—what a wretched lot! and how well they mean to support me! What confidence! Please call their attention to my action two weeks ago when the French pressed me to attack the strong lines of defence east of Roye-Chaulnes front. I wrote you at the time and instead of attacking south of the Somme I started Byng’s attack. I assure you I watch the drafts most carefully.”

Henry Wilson’s defence was feeble: “It isn’t really want of confidence in you,” he wrote, “it is much more the constant—and growing—embarrassment about man power that makes the Government uneasy; it is the curiously hostile attitude on several points of both the French and the Americans, it is the uneasy spirit in this country as evinced by the police strike, it is these and other cognate matters which make the Cabinet sensitive of heavy losses especially if these are incurred against old lines of fortification.” Whatever this may have meant, it seemed a poor excuse for dispatching a warning to a Commander-in-Chief about to go into battle that he must be careful not to incur casualties.

But the advance continued. On September 2nd:

“Third Army took Riencourt-lez-Cagnicourt at 2 a.m. this morning with 380 prisoners. The attack was carried out by a brigade of the 52nd (Lowland) Division.

“The 1st and 4th Canadian Divisions with 4th Division attacked the Drocourt-Quéant line south of the Scarpe at 5 a.m. to-day. Reports at 10 a.m. show that the attack is progressing well, and prisoners from seven different divisions have been taken. General Brutinel’s force (a Canadian Regiment, motor machine guns, armoured cars, cyclists,



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etc.) was on the main Arras-Cambrai road south-west of Dury at 8.5 a.m. and the British 1st Division was advancing from the old German front line east of Arras, to occupy the Drocourt line and push on to the Canal du Nord if all goes well.

“After lunch I motored to Noyelle-Vion (headquarters of the Canadian Corps) and saw the B.G.G.S. (Webber). He told me that the position had been captured without much loss, thanks mainly to the tanks. After getting the position, our troops came under fire from many machine guns as they advanced, and losses became severe in the case of the 4th Canadian Division. The enemy had done his utmost to hold his position, and had moved forward many reinforcements. The Canadian Corps had taken prisoners from ten different divisions. Enemy had local superiority in the air, and prevented our aeroplanes from observing over Ecourt St. Quentin. Eight of our machines were destroyed here.

“I went on to headquarters 4th Division, which was established in dug-outs on the main Cambrai road near Monchy-le-Preux. General Matheson had gone forward with his brigades, but I saw the G.S.O.1 and the C.R.A. Enemy was holding a wood east of Etaing with machine guns; these fired up the valley, and caused much damage.

“The officer examining the prisoners stated that the morale of the German officers was now terribly low. He had at no period of the war seen them in such a despicable state. The prisoners I saw seemed well fed, but badly drilled.

“Near Wancourt I visited headquarters of 4th Canadian and 1st Canadian Divisions. General Watson commanding the former corroborated what Webber had said re taking the position with little loss; and he added that the tanks had been sent off after getting the enemy's defences, in order to economise tanks and save loss in them. Now his infantry

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was having a bad time from the enemy's machine guns, which were scattered on the lower slopes east of the Drocourt line. Watson seemed disturbed by the report of the losses he had had, but on enquiry I found that they did not amount to many. Watson also stated that the German private soldiers abused their officers and N.C.O.'s and would no longer obey their orders.

"I next saw General Macdonell commanding the 1st Canadian Division. He was in great spirits. His troops had taken Villers-lez-Cagnicourt without any difficulty and were now on the spur north of Buissy. Many of the enemy surrendered without fighting.

"At Bretencourt I saw General Fergusson commanding our 17th Corps. He explained how the 52nd and 57th Division had taken Riencourt and an immensely strong triangle of trenches, and wire, to the east of it, in the early morning without trouble. The right of the 52nd Division was held up by machine-gun fire from the direction of Lagnicourt, but the left of the division was able to go right on, and moved eastwards on the northern side of Quéant. The 63rd Division then passed through and got along the railway from near Quéant to Buissy. This movement was well done, and the whole day had been a great success. He too said of the prisoners that his Provost Marshal reported that they would not obey their officers. Discipline in the German army seemed to have gone—if this is true, then the end cannot now be far off, I think. To-day's battle has truly been a great and glorious success.

On the next day, September 3rd, he wrote:

"Cold night. A few showers in morning, but afternoon fine and bright. Weather looks more settled.

"During the night Third Army took Rocquigny and occupied Quéant. This morning enemy is said to be retreating on the front of our Third and First Armies.

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“Our troops have reached (9 a.m.) the line Bertincourt-Doignies-Pronville. First Army is on hill south of Buissy. Thence line passes west of the latter village Dury and Etaing, both inclusive. Advance is continuing to Canal du Nord. I expect that the results of our success in yesterday's great battle should be very far reaching.

“I left my train about noon, and motored to Ficheux with Heseltine. We had lunch at the side of the road. Horses met me here and I rode to Boisleux St. Marc to the headquarters of the 56th Division. Major-General Hull explained in detail what his division had done. Their casualties amount to over 2,000, but they captured 3,100 prisoners.

“At St. Leger I saw Major-General Hill commanding 52nd (Lowland) Division. His men fought splendidly yesterday. It was all individual hand-to-hand work. His division is much below strength. Drafts for Scots units are now nearly exhausted.

“At l'Homme Mort (about a mile further) I visited headquarters Guards Division and General Feilding explained the operations of his command. To-day the division is pushing on at a great rate. The enemy seems to be running away. Only 15 prisoners have been taken so far.

“At Gommecourt (headquarters 62nd Division) General Whigham was out, but his G.S.O.I explained to me how the enemy had been deceived and outflanked yesterday.

“Lastly I rode to Ervillers and had a talk with General Haldane commanding VI Corps. He has an advanced headquarters here. To-day he is employing the 2nd Division and the Guards. These he kept fresh for the ‘pursuit’, he said. They know the ground too over which they are now advancing. All ranks are in the very highest spirits.

“The enemy seems in full retreat to-day on the whole front from Lens to Péronne. I am inclined to think that the enemy will be unable to remain on the Hindenburg

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line for any time, but will seek for rest and peace behind the Meuse and the Namur defences, in order to refit his shattered divisions."

On September 4th:

"I left soon after 9 a.m. with Lawrence for Mouchy le Châtel, where Marshal Foch met me at noon. He was particularly pleased with the results of the operations carried out by the British. He spoke of 'la grande bataille' won by us on Monday, and thought that it would produce a great effect on the enemy's plans. I explained the situation on the British front. Foch then produced a 'directive' dated 3rd September. This did not affect the task of the British, but ordered certain moves by the Americans and by the French in combination with our attacks. Foch had a great deal of trouble in getting Pershing to agree to attack *at once*. Pershing looks forward to the creation of a great American Army, and will now only allow his American divisions to fight in American corps. However, Foch managed to bring Pétain and Pershing together and fixed up all details for a combined attack under Pétain.

"I lunched with Foch after our talk, and after lunch took a little walk with him. He is most hopeful, and thinks the German is nearing the end. Reports came in that the enemy is in full retreat on the Vesle and Ham fronts."

Meanwhile Haig, with the approval of Foch, had prepared plans and given orders for an advance on the extreme left of his line of battle. This was to be undertaken by Plumer commanding the Second Army in conjunction with the Belgians who held that portion of the front which divided the Second Army from the sea. On September 5th:

"General Plumer came to see me about 11 a.m. regarding the instructions which I sent him for co-operating with the Belgian Army. He was inclined to continue his efforts to press the enemy back between the Yser and Armentières

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and retake Messines. I told him the most important object was to get the Belgians to advance. With this in view, he was to employ two good divisions on his left with orders to co-operate closely with the Belgians' right. First objective should be Clerken ridge-Forêt d'Houthoult and the Passchendaele ridge. Then, when the main attacks of the Allies have developed, he should be prepared to move a division by sea to Ostend and occupy Bruges, pushing on his left on the Dutch frontier, and connecting with the Anglo-Belgian Army on the line Thourout-Roulers. The first thing, however, was to get the Belgians moving, and for this I authorised him to employ two divisions on the Belgian right. Plumer said that he had every confidence that the Belgian troops would do well once they had started."

It has been seen how Haig had long believed that it would be possible to reach a decision in the autumn, and that this view had not been shared by the authorities in London. The events of these September days had convinced him that he would now be justified in attempting to impose his views upon the Government and to persuade them to alter their policy accordingly.

On September 7th he wrote to Henry Wilson:

"I propose coming over on Monday for a couple of days, as I am anxious to have a talk with you and the Secretary of State.

"The situation has changed so rapidly and, as I look at it, seems so different from what it was when you home authorities made your plans for the provision of men, aeroplanes, tanks, etc. that it seems most desirable to review your figures in the light of the existing state of affairs. . . . The situation as regards the enemy is most favourable for us at this present moment so it ought to be exploited as soon as possible and to the utmost of our power."

Four days later Haig attended a conference at Cassel

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where Foch was present and where the Belgian scheme was further discussed.

“Foch first of all had a private talk with myself and Weygand. He told me that he saw the King of the Belgians this morning, and that although the Belgian Staff opposed any advance by the Belgian Army, the King was all in favour of action. Foch had accordingly made a plan. Practically the same one as Plumer had put forward and I approved. The King of the Belgians would command in person with a French general (de Goutte) as Chief of the Staff, but under another title. I agreed that Plumer should take orders from the King regarding the operations.”

The next morning he received a visit from Winston Churchill:

“I told him that I considered that *the Allies should aim at getting a decision as soon as possible*. This month or next, not next spring or summer as the Cabinet proposed. And that our greatest effort should be made at once, so as to take advantage of the present disorganised state both of the German Army and of the German plans. Our reserves of ammunition, and programmes of future constructions should also be reviewed in this light. Further, that it would be a mistake to provide the Army with a new form of weapon after 31st December—if any new form of training were required. Churchill agreed, and said that he would go into the matter and do his best to set free men from munition factories.”

On September 9th Haig crossed to England and the following morning he, together with his Chief of Staff, General Lawrence, had an interview with Lord Milner at the War Office.

“I had specially asked for this interview, and I stated that the object of my visit was to explain how greatly the situation in the field had changed to the advantage of the

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Allies. I considered it to be of first importance that the Cabinet should realise how all our plans and methods are at once affected by this change.

“Within the last four weeks we had captured 77,000 prisoners and nearly six hundred guns. There has never been such a victory in the annals of Britain, and its effects are not yet apparent. The German prisoners now taken will not obey their officers or N.C.O.’s. The same story of indiscipline is told me of the prisoners from our hospitals. The discipline of the German Army is quickly going, and a German officer is no longer what he was. From these and other facts I draw the conclusion that the enemy’s troops will not await our attacks in even the strongest position.

“Briefly, in my opinion, the character of the war has changed. What is wanted now at once is to provide the means to exploit our recent great successes to the full. Reserves in England should be regarded as reserves for the French front, and all yeomanry, cyclists and other troops now kept for civil defence should be sent to France at once.

“If we act with energy now, a decision can be obtained in the very near future.

“As regards next year, aim at having all our units full up by 1st April. To consider that 1st July is ‘time enough’ is thoroughly unsound. All reserves of ammunition, aeroplanes, etc. should be reviewed in the light of the present situation. These reserves may well be reduced in order to set free men for the Army; men already marked for the Navy should for the next six months be sent to the Army. It is also important to provide the Army with infantry drafts and mobile troops to exploit success.

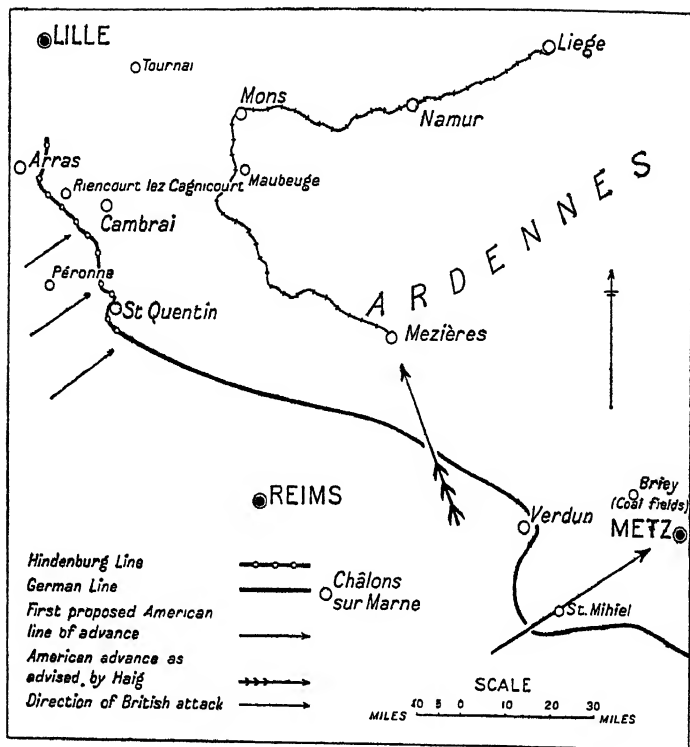
“Lord Milner fully agreed and said he would do his best to help.”





# THE AMERICAN ATTACK

## 12<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER, 1918



MAP 9

## VICTORY

The next day:

“At 1.30 I lunched with the King at Buckingham Palace. He had come up this morning from Windsor for an investiture and brought up a cold lunch with him. We lunched alone off cold grouse, some ham, etc. All quite excellent, and for drink I had cider cup. H.M. was most hospitable and kind, and looked after me, as I would look after any guest. We discussed the war and general topics. The King was in the best of spirits.”

Those who understood the full significance of the daily events in France had sound cause for high spirits at last. The next evening when Haig returned to his headquarters he learnt that:

“Our Third Army had a very successful day to-day. The 2nd and 62nd Divisions captured Havrincourt and the 37th and New Zealand Divisions Trescault village and ridge. About a brigade from each division was employed. Over one thousand prisoners were taken.

“The Fourth Army took the Bois d’Holnon and also St. Quentin Wood; Jeancourt (further north) was also occupied. Bois d’Holnon is a very strong position. It seems to have been taken without much difficulty. The ‘triangle’ east of Givenchy was also taken by our First Army to-day.

“The Americans attacked the St. Mihiel salient this morning. Nine divisions on the east side and one, aided by one French colonial division, on the west side. The former attacked on a 17-mile front and advanced five miles. About 10,000 prisoners are reported taken. Nonsard, Thiancourt, St. Mihiel, Dommethers all captured. Attack was expected, but the violence of the attack was greater apparently than the Germans anticipated.”

On September 14th:

“At 12.30 General de Goutte, who has recently been attached to the staff of the King of the Belgians, came to

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see me. He and his chief of Staff, as well as General de Laguiche, stayed to lunch.

"I told de Goutte that I was most anxious to help him and the Belgian Army to the utmost of my power, and would provide maps or hand over railways and stations as required.

"De Goutte came to support me last November when the Third Army broke through the Hindenburg line near Cambrai. He has a mongolian type of head, but I think him a first-rate soldier, apparently honest and very keen. I think his selection to help the King of the Belgians is a very good one.

"General Du Cane arrived from Foch's headquarters in time for dinner and stayed the night. I told him of my plans with dates, and asked him to arrange for Debeney commanding French First Army on our right to co-operate, and to have his preparations completed in time."

On September 15th:

"I held a conference with the three commanders of armies on my right, viz. General Rawlinson on right; Byng next and Horne on the Scarpe with right on Canal du Nord, west of Bournon wood. Conference took place at Third Army headquarters at Villers l'Hôpital at 11 a.m. Army commanders in turn explained the situation and outlined the general plan. We then went into the actions of each army.

"Rawlinson's Army is now in close touch with the enemy's 'outpost zone' of defence in front of the Hindenburg line. Enemy seems to have strengthened his force holding the line of heights from Le Verguier to Epéhy. On the other hand, in all combats which our troops have recently had with the enemy, the latter has not really fought. The First Army (Horne) stated the same thing, but Byng (Third Army) said the fighting at Trescault and Havrin-

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court had been severe. Enemy had put in five divisions there in the last three days.

“As the result of our discussion, I decided that Rawlinson should attack in force as soon as possible to capture the enemy’s outpost zone on the Le Verguier-Epéhy ridges, and if possible push his right forward to get the rising ground about Fayet and Gricourt north-west of St. Quentin. The possession of this height is important for gun positions to attack the main Hindenburg line subsequently. Rawlinson stated that the French First Army was unable to support him. General Debeney has done very little during these operations since 8th August.

“After Rawlinson’s attack has taken place (probably on the 18th) we should know more about the nature of the Hindenburg line defences and how they are held. My present view, is that main attack will be made by Rawlinson against the canal tunnel with the object of reaching Bussigny. The Third Army will support him and advance on Soissons. Horne will take Bourslon wood and cover the left of our Third Army by holding a front on the rivers Scarpe and Scheldt as far as Valenciennes. Kavanagh with our Cavalry Corps will be ready to pursue. On Tuesday I am holding an exercise for the Cavalry Corps against a marked enemy, in order to practise all ranks in the pursuit.”

It may seem strange to some readers that in the middle of a war, and within sound of the guns, mimic warfare should have been practised on a large scale for the sake of training. Such exercises, however, usually on a smaller scale, were part of the regular routine of those troops who were not engaged in battle, and it would be a mistake to suppose that the divisions who were not in the line and were said to be resting led an idle or a lazy existence. Haig enjoyed a field day of this nature with all the zest of a trained staff officer.

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“We breakfasted at 7 a.m. and got away soon after 7.30 by motor. General Lawrence and Thompson accompanied me, and General Maxse met me on the ridge north of the crossing over the river Canche at Fillièvres. To-day I arranged for an exercise for the Cavalry Corps in the ‘Pursuit’. Troops started at 8.30 a.m. and worked southwards over the Canche and Authie rivers. I motored about looking at the operations till 10.30 and then visited the report centre at the Town Hall in Auxi-le-Château. Here reports from the various umpires came in by wire and dispatch riders. The enemy was represented by detachments of infantry with machine gunners. The latter fired their machine guns into holes dug in the ground, and pointed a big arrow (wooden and painted white) in the direction in which they were firing. This seemed to answer well. Some of the bridges over the rivers were purposely unguarded, so that the cavalry patrols should be given an opportunity of scouting and reporting what passages were open. Thus it was possible to see how far the leader on the spot took advantage of a favourable situation to press on.

“About 11 a.m. we reached Villeroy-sur-Authie. Here the bridge was destroyed because there was a ford in the vicinity. This latter was well found by the contact squadron of the 4th D.G. and the village was quickly captured. I got on my horse here and rode about amongst the troops. Although the village was captured about 11, it was not for 1½ hours that the brigadier (Algy Lawson) heard of it and took advantage of the success to cross the river in force. I found that the signals were not in touch with the brigade headquarters. We had our lunch near Villeroy and afterwards I rode via Cumonville and Maison Ponthieu to Heirmont. I sent word to stop operations at 3 p.m. and rode on via Maisicourt to Auxi-le-Château, which I reached soon after 4 p.m. I then had a conference in the theatre

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here, which was attended by all commanders and staff officers down to officers commanding regiments. I commented on the lack of method in reconnoitring and the thoughtless riding of horses in many cases, etc. Much useful work was done and Kavanagh stated that they had all learnt a very great deal.

“This was the first day’s work of the new training staff under Maxse.<sup>1</sup> They did well.”

On September 16th there was a meeting with Foch.

“After a general review of the situation on the British front and outlining my plans, I asked that Debeney’s French First Army should be reinforced so as to enable it to co-operate with Rawlinson on Wednesday by taking the village of Fayet, north-west of St. Quentin. Foch said that Debeney was very weak, and his guns had been taken for other armies, but he would see that Debeney was strengthened sufficiently to enable him to cover Rawlinson’s right. The dividing line was moved 1,000 yards to the south, thus giving the village of Fayet to Rawlinson. As regards the operations in Flanders, Foch agreed with me that it was not necessary or desirable for Plumer to attack the Messines-Wytschaete position. Plumer’s attack with two divisions should be towards Zandvoorde and Gheluvelt, and these divisions should be well supported in order that the flank of the Belgians should be adequately covered, and the exploiting force enabled to move out at once. Foch gave me the details of the movements of the other attacks, dates, etc. He expressed the wish that I should continue my activity for another week. I explained that Rawlinson’s attack would commence on Wednesday, and that the rest of the front to Bourslon wood would be pressing the enemy hard all the time.”

<sup>1</sup>Lieut.-General Sir Ivor Maxse, formerly commanding the XVIII Corps, had been made Inspector-General of training.

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On the Wednesday the promised attack was launched, and it proved eminently successful.

“Fourth Army (9th Australian and III Corps) and V Corps of Third Army attacked at 5.20 a.m. on front from Bois d’Holnon on south, to Gouzeaucourt on north. Attack was most successful.

“Our front of attack was about 18 miles in length. We met and defeated 13 enemy divisions in front line together with 3 more divisions brought up from reserve—a total of 16 divisions. The 6th Division from Thourout in Flanders was identified in the battle. It was the only remaining enemy division in reserve north of the Lys.

“The enemy only fought well in a few places, but opposite the Australians he surrendered easily. Over 3,000 prisoners were taken by the two Australian divisions engaged, and our losses were very small.

“The Fourth Army has already passed over 6,000 prisoners through their cages, and the Third Army claim over 1,500. So I expect the numbers taken to-day will be close on 10,000.

“The enemy launched heavy counter-attacks against the front of our Third Army from Villers Guislain as far north as Moeuvres. All attacks were defeated and the enemy’s losses are stated to be very severe.

“After seeing the heads of branches, and General Clive who has taken over charge of Intelligence Branch, I left about 11 a.m. with Lawrence for Cassel.

“We lunched about 1 o’clock in the grounds of a house on the lower slopes of the hill, from which a fine view of the country towards the south-west is obtained. At 1.30 I had a meeting with General Plumer in his house at Cassel. He explained to me his plans, based on instructions sent him yesterday, viz. *not* to attack the Messines position, but to turn it by attacking in the directions of Becelaere, Kruisick

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and Zandvoorde. He will take the offensive on the left of his front with 4 divisions. Behind these will be 2 good divisions in reserve. I only promised our allies that Plumer should put 2 divisions into the fight. Plumer's role will be to form a defensive flank along the Lys to cover the right flank of a French force of 3 divisions of infantry and 3 of cavalry, which will move via Roulers eastward with the Belgian Army on the left moving via Thourout on Bruges.

"At 3 p.m. I had a meeting with the King of the Belgians at La Panne. Generals Plumer and Lawrence were present with me. I explained our plan and why I was opposed to attacking Messines. He asked me whether I was satisfied with the general plan. I replied yes, and that I felt no doubt about its being successful provided that the troops were in good heart, because the enemy had no force available with which to stop His Majesty's attack. The King said that the Belgian Army was in the very best spirits and meant to fight well.

"As regards a 4-hours' bombardment which the Belgian General Staff proposed, I stated that the objection was that it would at once announce to the enemy that an attack was in preparation, and he might be able to organise a counter-operation with gas upon the troops when concentrated for the attack. This might have serious consequences."

In the midst of these continual successes a short correspondence took place between Haig and Henry Wilson which is so characteristic of both men that it is worth preserving. On September 19th Henry Wilson wrote:

"My General,

Well done! you must be a famous General!

Henry."



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To which Haig replied on the following day:

“My dear Henry,

Very many thanks for your kind little note of yesterday. No, certainly not! I am not nor am I likely to be a ‘famous General’. For that must we not have pandered to Repington and the Gutter Press? But we have a surprisingly large number of *very capable* generals. Thanks to these gentlemen and to their ‘sound military knowledge built up by study and practice until it has become an instinct’ and to a steady adherence to the principles of our Field Service Regulations Part I are our successes to be chiefly attributed.”

The hour of triumph is as true a test of character as the hour of disaster. To treat both those impostors with the same equanimity is the hallmark of greatness of mind. At such a moment Haig’s anxiety to share all credit with his subordinate generals, his refusal to put forward any claim to inspired leadership and his insistence that his successes were due merely to rigid adherence to sound principles prove surely that he was not, what he has often been called, an ordinary man. If this were the common order of mankind, it would be a different and a better world.

He was above all persistent during these days in his endeavour to impress upon the Government the importance of not relaxing their efforts in view of the possible imminence of victory. “*Tout le monde à la bataille*” was the inspiring slogan of Foch. Haig was incapable of coining a slogan, and would not have done so if he could, but the words expressed his policy in a nutshell.

On September 21st:

“I had another talk with Milner. He states recruiting is bad, and that if the British Army is used up now there will be no men for next year. He was quite satisfied that I should do what I deemed best in the matter of attacking or not. I

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pointed out that the situation was most satisfactory and that in order to take advantage of it every available man should be put into the battle at once. In my opinion, it is possible to get a decision this year; but if we do not, every blow that we deliver now will make the task next year much easier."

According to Henry Wilson's diary of September 23rd Milner remained unconvinced. "He thinks Haig ridiculously optimistic and is afraid that he may embark on another Passchendaele. He warned Haig that if he knocked his present army about there was nothing to replace it. Milner saw many generals in France and they were all most optimistic. The man power is the trouble, and Douglas Haig and Foch and Du Cane can't understand it."

It seems that all the victories of August and September had not won for Haig the full confidence of even the most reliable members of the Government. They argued that he had been optimistic before and his optimism had not been justified. But would they have preferred him to have been pessimistic in the past? A general who goes into battle without the confidence of victory is not fit to command. It was true that Haig had hoped on former occasions for greater results than he had been able to accomplish, but never before had he spoken with certainty of early victory, and never before had he spoken with such a record of success.

Meanwhile preparations progressed for the assault on the Hindenburg line. On September 21st Haig held a conference with his army commanders in the château at Bavincourt.

"Each army commander in turn gave his views on the situation on his front, and what he thought were the enemy's intentions.

"Plumer considered that the enemy was unaware of his and the Belgian preparations. The enemy is preparing to go

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back to the Passchendaele ridge, and to shorten his line southwards also.

“Birdwood also thought that the enemy was preparing to go back on his front as far south as Lens.

“Horne agreed also to this. As regards the rest of our First Army front, he was of opinion that the enemy would not move back until attacked.

“As regards our Third and Fourth Army fronts, I think that the enemy must hold on at all costs to the Cambrai-St. Quentin front *until* his troops on the Champagne and Laon fronts have been withdrawn, otherwise their retreat will be cut off.

“As regards our own operations, the objective of the main British effort will be the line Valenciennes-Le Cateau-Wassigny. We are confronted by a strong, well sited series of defences, and the enemy appears to have collected a certain number of reserves behind the Cambrai-St. Quentin front. I therefore do not propose to attack until the American-French attack has gone in. This latter attack *might* draw off some of the enemy's reserves from our front. I therefore would like to attack two or three days *after* the main American-French attack. If we could arrange this, there was a chance of the enemy's reserves being unavailable for either battle.”

On September 23rd he met Foch when they “discussed the situation and fixed the dates for the several attacks”.

On September 24th:

“About noon Admiral Keyes came to see me. He flew over from Dover and flew back to Flanders to see the King of the Belgians. I told Keyes to arrange to get hold of Ostend as soon as the Belgians were round the place on the land side. And I directed Lawrence to keep a good company of infantry ready at Dunkirk to embark if Admiral Keyes asks for them.”









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On September 25th Haig visited the Third Army.

“I found Byng in an improvised railway train and quite comfortable. He had gutted the inside of an international sleeping car and put his various requirements into two compartments of it. I also saw Vaughan, his C.S.O. I thought that they were unduly afraid that our troops are going to meet strong enemy reserves on the Cambrai-St. Quentin front. In consequence they are desirous for me to wait and do nothing for some days, so as to allow the other attacks time in which to produce an effect and cause the enemy to withdraw some of his reserves from before us. I therefore told Byng of the dates fixed for the various attacks in agreement with Marshal Foch, viz. the Franco-American attack with *right* on Meuse and advancing north-west will be on Thursday 26th; my attack with our First Army and left of Third Army will take place as I arranged last Saturday, namely on Friday 27th. The Flanders attack will go in on Saturday 28th, and then my Fourth Army on Sunday 29th. The delay in the Flanders attack is due to the lack of reserves behind it; it is therefore desirable to engage the enemy in force elsewhere, and so fix the enemy's reserves before the Flanders attack goes in. I then motored on to Bois du Hennois, headquarters V Corps and had a talk with Lieut.-General Shute. He said his divisions were full of cheer, but very ‘sleepy’. A few days' rest and they would be as fit as ever again. The 21st Division (David Campbell) had, after the first start, done splendidly. He also spoke about the difficult task which confronted him in attacking Gouzeaucourt and Gonnellieu spur. I told him my plan was to cross the canal at Marcoing, and by the Bellicourt tunnel, and then the centre of the enemy's position (opposite which is his corps) would fall of itself. All he would be wanted to do would be to advance sufficiently to be able to counter-battery the enemy's artillery. Shute had a very comfortable



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hut made by the Germans. The whole of his hutment is on a hill under trees and is reached by an excellent plank road.

“At Grevillers, headquarters IV Corps, I saw Lieut.-General Harper. He was back in the old headquarters which his corps occupied before the enemy’s attack in March last. He explained his plans, and said he had no doubts about reaching his objectives on Friday, but expected that the enemy would fight hard, if he was still holding his present front. To-day, however, the enemy had fallen back from two trenches.

“At Ervillers, headquarters VI Corps, Lieut.-General Haldane stated that he expected to be across the canal near Marcoing on Friday afternoon. He was attacking with the 3rd Division on the right and the Guards on his left, while the 62nd and 2nd were in second line ready to go through the two leading divisions to the line of the canal east of Marcoing. Noyelles-sur-l’Escaut on the left. All his troops were full of confidence and had been giving the enemy a very hard time of it. Cantaing and Fontaine Notre Dame further north are to be attacked by the XVII Corps. . . .

“This morning reports of a railway strike in England are serious. Our supply of ammunition would be greatly affected by such a strike. I ordered no change to be made, however, as I have full confidence in the good sense of our railwaymen at home. Some means will be found to keep up our supply of ammunition even if the worst happens. If the strike continues I ordered all leave to be stopped from to-morrow.”

Haig’s confidence in the workers at home and in the soldiers abroad was justified. On September 27th was delivered the attack which had been so carefully planned. The Hindenburg line fell before the First and the Third Armies. This was the beginning of the decisive battle of the war, and it was a military achievement of a magnitude which is

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seldom realised. This great line of defence had been constructed at leisure and all the engineering talent of Germany had been devoted to the task of rendering it as formidable as possible. Full use had been made of two great canals, the Scheldt Canal and the Canal du Nord. In some places the British infantry carried lifebelts and rafts in addition to their ordinary equipment. So burdened they slid down the steep slope of the canal into deep water, and were faced by an arduous climb upon the further side. Even in the few places where the canal cutting was dry it presented an obstacle which seemed insurmountable if defended by a determined foe. Great indeed was the responsibility of the Commander-in-Chief who had ordered the storming of such a stronghold, and who, far from receiving any encouragement from his Government, had been warned that if he failed he would be called to account for the casualties.

But he did not fail. The great fortress fell, almost like the walls of Jericho. With clockwork precision companies, battalions, brigades, divisions, army corps and armies advanced as the hour struck and captured the positions that had been assigned to them. Typical of the whole movement was the experience of the officers of one company. On the night of the 26th they gave their servants the map reference of the exact spot in the German trenches where they were to be met for luncheon on the following day. They attacked before dawn and at 1.30 at the appointed place officers, servants and luncheon were all present.

On the two following days the attack was continued and, the Fourth Army taking part on the right and the Second Army on the left, the advance became general along the whole British line of battle.

On September 30th "Marshal Foch came to see me at 9.30 a.m. He was with the King of the Belgians yesterday at La Panne. He said that he is much pleased with the posi-

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tion in Belgium, and the progress made by the allied armies there, as well as on the British front. As regards the American operations west of the Meuse, he says the Americans have employed too many troops on that front, so that they have blocked each other's advance. In fact, they have not been able to feed so many divisions in that area. But they are going on attacking and are 'learning all the time'. Pétain is now using some American troops to push on towards Machault (south east of Rethel). I asked Foch to send 3 American divisions to Plumer. Foch said it was not possible at present as 'their amour propre made the Americans determined to press on to Mézières'. But later on 'he would see what could be done when Pershing has learnt the difficulty of creating an army'. I explained what my plans were and the direction of the advance of our Cavalry Corps. Foch said, 'we are in complete agreement'. Lawrence brought me a report that our IX Corps were now operating northwards in co-operation with the Australians, who were relieving the Americans and attacking northwards through them, and it was desirable that Debeney should take Thorigny village (north of St. Quentin). Foch at once concurred and he himself telephoned to Debeney, telling him to carry out his orders immediately when Debeney began to ask questions.

"Foch told me that the 'Bulgarians had agreed to all our terms of peace'. Foch was of opinion that the Germans cannot much longer resist our attacks against their whole front and that 'soon they will crack'."

When the month of September was ended and the Hindenburg line had fallen, the war in fact was finished, although for six more weeks the fighting continued while the facts were slowly being realised by the soldiers and statesmen on either side.

On the 1st of the month Haig visited Byng and Rawlin-

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son, who both considered that the enemy had suffered very much, and that it was merely a question of our continuing our pressure to ensure his completely breaking. They agreed that no further orders from me were necessary and both would be able to carry on without difficulty. . . . All our troops are said to be in the highest spirits."

On October 2nd, "I met Mr. Gompers (head of the American Labour Unions) and his friend Mr. Fry at 1 o'clock at Hermies. Gompers accompanied me in my car to see the iron girder road bridge which was in process of being launched across the Canal du Nord to carry the road to Havrincourt. Both Gompers and Fry were much impressed with the magnitude of the engineering works now in hand immediately behind the fighting troops. I also showed him the wooden railway bridge made by the Canadian railway troops, and then took him to lunch in the adjoining valley below Havrincourt. I had the usual lunch in the lunch box, and we had quite a cheery lunch party. Gompers is a fairly old man, and walks slowly, and gets out of the car with some difficulty. I should estimate his age at close on 70. He seems to have extraordinary power in the United States, where he has complete control over Labour. He is determined to go on until the Germans are beaten. 'There never has been such a just cause for war as we are now fighting for.' He was most complimentary in his remarks about the British Army and of what we had done. He pressed me to visit America after the war. I thanked him, but said I must have a rest from 'propaganda', and that I wished to live my own life quietly with my wife and children."

Daily Haig visited army, corps and divisional commanders to discuss the situation and to give advice as to how the task of harassing the enemy should be continued. He saw that the only danger lay in allowing the Germans time to

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recover from the series of blows they had received. Winston Churchill, in a letter of hearty congratulations of the 1st October, wrote, "It seems to me that every effort should now be concentrated on the supreme and final effort of the spring." Haig, while thanking him warmly for "the kindly sympathy which you extended to me during the anxious time we passed through last spring and for the immense vigour with which you set about providing us with munitions",—insisted upon the paramount importance of maintaining the Army at full strength "in order to beat the enemy as soon as possible."

When he visited Foch on October 6th he found the Generalissimo sitting with a Paris morning paper open on the table in front of him. In large type was printed a note from Germany, Austria and Turkey asking for an armistice. "Here", said Foch, pointing to the paper, "you have the immediate result of the British piercing the Hindenburg line. The enemy has asked for an armistice." It was nobly and generously said.

It is the more to be regretted that there must be recorded an incident which cast a cloud over the relations between the two great soldiers in this month of victory. It has been seen that Haig had consented to the placing of his Second Army under the command of the King of the Belgians during the operations which were designed to clear the ground on the left flank of the allied line up to the river Lys. This task had now been successfully accomplished and Haig was anxious that the Second Army should once more be placed under his own command. Foch, for various reasons, resisted this not unreasonable demand.

At a meeting on October 24th, "I explained the military reasons why my Second Army must now be under my orders. If there were political reasons requiring the Second Army to remain under King Albert, then the British

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Government must direct me on the subject. Until I was so informed I must continue to view the situation from a military standpoint and insist on the return of the Second Army without delay. Foch asked me to submit my request in writing. He would then let me have his views."

On the following day Haig addressed a formal request to Foch, in writing, for the return of the Second Army. Foch replied on the 26th to the effect that the Flanders group of armies was now marching on the Scheldt, that he had issued a "directive" on the 19th for the guidance of that group's operations, that it was necessary that it should remain under one command, as any alteration of plan at the present juncture would cause considerable difficulties. Haig was in Paris when he received this letter and he asked Lord Derby to speak to Clemenceau on the subject. Clemenceau on being approached "at once said that the French Government as well as the British would be behind me in demanding the return of the Second Army to my command. Derby thought the whole matter was settled, but Clemenceau was going to see Foch in the afternoon, and would settle the question if Foch was in a reasonable mood."

That same evening, however, "About 7 p.m. Derby came to see me and stated Clemenceau had seen Foch and had returned much less determined than before about restoring the Second Army to my command. Wilson also came in. We decided that I should write a letter to Foch which Wilson will take to him to-morrow morning."

Haig accordingly wrote once more to Foch setting forth the reasons why he desired the return of the Second Army. Henry Wilson was his messenger, nor could he in this instance have had a better one, for Wilson not only thought that Haig was in the right, but he was prepared, if necessary, to insist in the name of the British Government on Foch's giving way. Moreover, he was a good diplomatist and

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understood Foch. He told Foch frankly that he was wrong, and Foch agreed to a compromise. Haig visited him at Senlis the next afternoon. "Foch was very pleased to see me, and was evidently anxious to make amends. We agreed that the Second Army should return to me on reaching the line of the Scheldt. This will be after the next operation. . . . Foch was very glad that the Second Army question was settled, because it would have been most unfortunate if the question had had to be settled by our Governments, especially at the present time when any report of dissension among the Allies would merely play into the enemy's hand."

So ended "with flowers and tea and delights" as Henry Wilson wrote, the last and the most serious difference of opinion that arose between Haig and Foch.

Throughout the months of October and during the first days of November, the fighting continued. On October 8th the Third and Fourth Armies attacked and "drove the enemy from his last defensive line east of the St. Quentin canal". The next morning General Vaughan, Byng's Chief of Staff, telephoned that "the Germans appear to have vanished. The V Corps are beyond Selvigny which is full of civilians. The IV Corps are approaching the railway, meeting with very little opposition, and picking up a few stragglers. The VI Corps are through Wambaix, and on the line of the railway."

On the 13th Haig visited, with Clemenceau, the recently recaptured Cambrai.

"We lunched at the back of a ruined house in Rumilly, south of Cambrai, and about 2.30 p.m. met M. Clemenceau who had motored from St. Quentin to meet me. I had an open car with me. M. Clemenceau and I got into this near the Faubourg de Paris. He put on General de La-guiche's overcoat, as his was a thin one. A battered looking

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old hat surmounted the lot. A queer looking old 'tiger' as he is called.

"In this way we arrived at the city gate where we were received by General Byng and General Horne and a guard of honour of the Leicestershire Regiment.

"An old curé who had been in Cambrai all the time and others were introduced to M. Clemenceau. I then conducted him in my open motor round the town. A great part is in ruins, due to the enemy having set many houses deliberately on fire.

"At 3 p.m. we visited the Mairie. Only the façade was left. The rest was in ruins as the result of a fire, and the whole square was also a mass of burnt houses, most of them gutted.

"The enemy has taken away all works of art, and cut to pieces the leather of the furniture and thrown the remains into the street.

"On leaving Cambrai I passed by Marcoing, Ribecourt and Havrincourt to the bridge made by the New Zealanders over the Canal du Nord.

"Clemenceau was much struck with what had been done, especially with the bridge and railway made by our troops.

"We reached his train at Bapaume shortly before 6 p.m. I spoke to him re Foch's proposals for an armistice. I said his demands were too complicated. We ought to say 'hand over Metz and Strassburg as a preliminary sign of your good faith'. Clemenceau quite agreed; then we can proceed at once to frame peace terms.

"I asked for some American divisions. Clemenceau was very keen to send me some and is to try to arrange it. He said France is very short indeed of labour and is anxious for some of our German prisoners of war. I promised to give him 10,000.



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“On leaving he thanked me ‘in the name of France’ for what I had done. He is evidently fully aware how the recent results obtained are entirely due to the boldness and tenacity of the British Army.”

Further attacks were made by the Second Army on October 14th and by the Fourth Army on the 17th. On the latter occasion, “Fourth Army met with considerable opposition, but made good progress. On the right we advanced over two miles across the high wooded ground east of Bohain, and captured Audigny les Fermes. Further north, the line of the Selle river has been taken, up to and including Le Cateau, and also the ridge to the east of the river. The villages of La Valle Mulâtre and L’Arbre du Guise have been taken. On the left of the attack, the line of the railway east of Le Cateau has been captured. Front of attack about nine miles. This was held by the enemy with 7 divisions disposed in depth. They were thus able to dispose of large reserves, which counter-attacked vigorously. All were repulsed, and the enemy lost many killed. About 4,000 prisoners have been taken by Fourth Army, and several guns, including two complete batteries.

“The enemy continued his withdrawal in the Lille sector. Fifth Army is now round Lille. Troops are not allowed to enter the town. The Mayor of Lille came to one of our brigade headquarters near Haubourdin, and reported that the enemy had evacuated the town at 4 a.m. and marched to Tournai. Food for eight days was left in Lille. First Army occupied Douai to-day after pressing enemy’s rearguards back from the Haute Deule canal. Opposition ceased at 12 noon, and the enemy went off.

“Second Army hold the southern bank of the Lys from Wambrechies to Quesnoy sur Deule, and have troops at La Vigue north of Reckem and south of Lawe.”

It was on the same day that Admiral Keyes effected his

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brilliant landing at Ostend. On the 23rd the Third and Fourth Armies attacked again.

“Our troops drove the enemy from Bois de l’Evêque, Bousies village and Bois de Vendégies; Neuville Salêches and Beaudignies were captured, and the crossings of the Ecaillon river secured at the latter place. At the close of the day the enemy counter-attacked vigorously opposite Vendégies, supporting his infantry with heavy artillery fire, and was repulsed.

“About 5,000 prisoners were taken by the Third Army, and over 1,000 by the Fourth Army in to-day’s operations.

“North of Valenciennes we cleared the enemy out of Forêt de Raismes and captured Thiers, Haute Rive and Thun. Determined fighting took place west of Tournai. The enemy seems to hold a strong bridgehead there.”

The last important attack took place on the 4th of November:

“This morning, at time varying from 5.30 to 6.15 our Fourth, Third and First Armies attacked between the Sambre canal at Oisy and the river Scheldt north of Valenciennes. A front of over 30 miles. The First French Army also attacked in co-operation on our right and made satisfactory progress. The French took 3,000 prisoners up to 5 p.m.

“At 8 p.m. Fourth Army reported ‘Attack is being pressed and progress made along the whole front of the army’. ‘Resistance which was stiff all the morning is weakening, except south of Landrecies, where stubborn fighting is still taking place. Our casualties have been light. Prisoners of 21 regiments of 9 or 10 divisions and 5 battalions of cyclist brigades have been taken to-day. Attack on so big a scale was not expected. Over 4,000 prisoners and 30 guns taken by Fourth Army to-day.’

“At 8.40 p.m. Third Army reported over 8,000 prisoners

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and 125 guns. Prisoners taken from 43 battalions of 20 regiments of 11 divisions. 'There has been considerable opposition on whole Army front to-day.' 38th and 17th Divisions advanced over 6,000 yards through the Forêt de Mormal. Le Quesnoy surrendered with 1,000 prisoners to the New Zealand Division.

"First Army does not report much progress after mid-day. The troops of the 22nd Corps had very hard fighting on the last 3 days; so this may account for the slowness of their progress.

"The weather has been very favourable—a fog in the valley until 8 a.m. This enabled our troops to get across the Canal de la Sambre without being seen. This part of the country is much enclosed with high hedges which have not been trimmed for at least the period of the war. The barrage only advanced at the rate of 6 minutes to 100 yards.

"The enemy seems to have placed all his strength in his front line. Consequently when this was overcome he had no reserves in rear with which to oppose our advance."

From the early days of August onwards, throughout these glorious weeks of victory, congratulations had been pouring in from every corner of the Empire, from public bodies and from private individuals, from the King, from Queen Alexandra, from the Lord Mayor of London and from Mayors of numerous cities not only in Great Britain, but in every colony and dominion. One of the shortest and simplest ran as follows:

"You will be tired of congratulations but just let me say that as you approach the scene of our former exploits together my heart and thoughts are with you. Don't reply. French."

There was no message which Haig was more pleased to receive, and it does credit to the generous heart of the man who sent it.

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It was not, however, until October 9th that a word of official congratulations or thanks was received from the British Government. On that date the Prime Minister telegraphed as follows:

"I have just heard from Marshal Foch of the brilliant victory won by the First, Third and Fourth Armies, and I wish to express to yourself, Generals Horne, Byng and Rawlinson, and all the officers and men under your command my sincerest congratulations on the great and significant success which the British armies, with their American brothers-in-arms, have gained during the past two days."

Why the events of the 8th and 9th of October should have been selected for the honour of the Prime Minister's attention, when the far more important victories gained in August and September had passed unnoticed, was never explained. The suggestion that the Prime Minister of Great Britain relied exclusively upon the French Generalissimo for his information regarding the movements of the British Army was, to say the least of it, infelicitous and, in view of Mr. Lloyd George's long experience in the use of words, it could hardly have been unintentional. He wished to make it plain that Foch, not Haig, was winning the war, and that Haig, like other subordinate army commanders and like his American brothers-in-arms, was only to be congratulated when Foch was kind enough to say that he had done well. Haig sent a suitable reply to the Prime Minister's message and made no reference to the incident in his diary.

It was on October 3rd, less than a week after the attack on the Hindenburg line had been launched, that the German Government appealed for an armistice. Their note was addressed to President Wilson and they referred to the fourteen points which he had laid down as conditions of peace. But an armistice is not a peace treaty, and the terms

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of an armistice must be decided by the military authorities on the spot.

Haig's views on the subject were definite from the first, nor, as the completeness of the Allies' victory became more manifest, did they undergo any alteration. He believed that the one and only way in which the morale of the German Army might be restored would be to insist upon terms so humiliating as to be unacceptable. He believed also that if the German Army could retreat beyond the Rhine they would, fighting in their own country for their own homes and defending a far narrower front, still remain a very formidable adversary. He was further convinced that during the next six months or more the main brunt of the fighting would be borne by the British. It has been seen how he went into the war without any feeling of personal animosity towards Germans. Four years of fighting, with all the propaganda that accompanied it, had not ruffled the serenity of his opinions nor stirred in him a germ of national hatred. He wanted to defeat German militarism, but he had no desire to inflict either misery or humiliation on the German people.

It was on October 10th that Haig first discussed with Foch the possible terms of an armistice. "Foch gave me a paper which he had handed to the allied conference in Paris on the subject of an armistice. He said that his opinion had not been asked, but he had nevertheless given his Prime Minister his paper. He had now heard that the conference agreed with what he had written and were very pleased to have his paper. His main points were:

- "(1) Evacuation of Belgium, France and Alsace-Lorraine;
- "(2) Hand over to the Allies to administer all the country up to the Rhine with three bridgeheads on the river. The size of each of the latter to be 30 km. from the crossing, drawn in a semi-circle.

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“(3) Germans to leave all material behind, huts, supplies, etc., railway trains, railways in order.

“(4) Enemy to clear out in 15 days from signing of agreement.

“I remarked that the only difference between his conditions and a ‘general unconditional surrender’ is that the German Army is allowed to march back with its rifles, and officers with their swords. He is evidently of opinion that the enemy is so desirous of peace that he will agree to any terms of this nature which we impose.”

A week later the Cabinet invited Haig to come to London in order to give them his views on this subject. He crossed on the 18th and on the following morning—“I visited the War Office soon after 10 a.m. and saw Wilson. He gave me his views on conditions of armistice. He considers that ‘the Germans should be ordered to lay down their arms and retire to the east bank of the Rhine’.

“I gave my opinion that our attack on the 17th instant met with considerable opposition, and that the enemy was not ready for unconditional surrender. In that case there would be no armistice, and the war continue for at least another year.

“We went over together to 10 Downing Street, and found Mr. Lloyd George, Lord Milner and Bonar Law discussing. General Davidson accompanied me.

“The Prime Minister asked my views on the terms which we should offer the enemy if he asked for an armistice. I replied that they must greatly depend on the answers we gave to two questions:

“(1) Is Germany now so beaten that she will accept whatever terms the Allies may offer, i.e. unconditional surrender?

“If she refuses to agree to our terms:

“(2) Can the Allies continue to press the enemy suffi-

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ciently vigorously during the coming winter months as to cause him to withdraw so quickly that he cannot destroy the railways, road, etc.?

"The answer to both is in the negative. The German Army is capable of retiring to its own frontier, and holding that line if there should be any attempt to touch the *honour* of the German people and make them fight with the courage of despair.

"The situation of the allied armies is as follows:

"*French Army*: Worn out, and has not been really fighting latterly. It has been freely said that the 'war is over' and 'we don't wish to lose our lives now that peace is in sight'.

"*American Army*: Is not yet organised; it is ill equipped, half trained, with insufficient supply services. Experienced officers and N.C.O.'s are lacking.

"*British Army*: Was never more efficient than it is to-day, but it has fought hard, and it lacks reinforcements. With diminishing effectives, morale is bound to suffer.

"The French and American Armies are not capable of making a serious offensive *now*. The British alone might bring the enemy to his knees. But why expend more British lives? and for what?

"In the coming winter, the enemy will have some months for recuperation and absorption of 1920 class, untouched as yet. He will be in a position to destroy all his communications before he falls back. This will mean serious delay to our advance if war goes on to next year.

"I therefore recommend that the terms of armistice should be:

"(1) Immediate evacuation of Belgium and occupied French territory;

"(2) Metz and Strassburg to be at once occupied by the allied armies and Alsace Lorraine to be vacated by the enemy;

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“(3) Belgian and French rolling stock to be returned and inhabitants restored.

“When I had finished my remarks, Hankey (the Secretary of the War Cabinet) came in and I had to repeat most of what I had said for him to note down.

“The Prime Minister seemed in agreement with me. Wilson urged ‘laying down arms’. Lord Milner took a middle course between my recommendations and those of Foch, i.e. in addition to what I laid down he would occupy the west bank of the Rhine as a temporary measure until the Germans have complied with our peace terms.

“About noon Mr. Balfour (S. of S. for Foreign Affairs) came in, and the whole story was gone over again.

“I was asked what the attitude of the Army would be if we stuck out for stiff terms which enemy then refuses and the war goes on. I reminded the Prime Minister of the situation a year ago when there were frequent demands for information as to what we were fighting for; he (the Prime Minister) then made a speech and stated our war aims. The British Army has done most of the fighting latterly, and everyone wants to have done with the war, *provided* we get what we want. I therefore advise that we only ask in the armistice for what we intend to hold, and that we set our face against the French entering Germany to pay off old scores. In my opinion, under the supposed conditions, the British Army would not fight keenly for what is really not its own affair.

“Mr. Balfour spoke about deserting the Poles and the people of Eastern Europe, but the Prime Minister gave the opinion that we cannot expect the British to go on sacrificing their lives for the Poles.”

The next day was Sunday. “Doris and I attended the Church of Scotland, Pont Street (St. Columba’s) at 11 a.m. The Rev. Dr. Fleming preached the sermon. He spoke of



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vengeance and punishment with reference to making peace with Germany. We could not wish to see our armies entering Germany to destroy a German town for a town of France, in conformity with the scriptural passage 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth'. On the other hand, the punishment must be adequate to the crime committed.

"Afterwards we called on Sir W. Robertson at his house in St. James's Palace. He knew very little of the military situation on the continent, and seems quite to have dropped out of government circles. He gave the opinion that our present successes are the result of the past two years of hard fighting. I quite agreed with this opinion."

The next morning Haig went early to the War Office where he saw General Macdonogh who was then Adjutant-General. "I showed him my note on proposals for an armistice. He agreed with me entirely. As regards man power, he stated that our latest figures showed that we are not able to maintain more than 36 divisions next year. At present we have 61 divisions. I then saw Henry Wilson. We discussed the situation. I gathered that the main reason why he was in favour of a 'complete surrender' for terms of an armistice is on account of Ireland. He is most keen that conscription should be applied to Ireland at once in order to get us more men, and as a means of pacifying Ireland. We went over to 10 Downing Street together and met the Prime Minister at 11.15 as directed. Lord Milner, Mr. Bonar Law and Mr. Balfour were present as members of the War Cabinet and Admiral Beatty (commanding the Grand Fleet) and Admiral Wemyss represented the Navy.

"We discussed the naval proposals for an armistice. They calculated that if the German High Sea Fleet came out and gave battle, our Grand Fleet would defeat it entirely but we would lose six or seven ships. So they recommend that all modern ships should now be handed over to the British

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because they would have been destroyed in the battle if it had taken place.

“Another point discussed was a request by the new Turkish Government to make peace. It was sent by General Townshend, a prisoner of war captured at Kut. He had arrived at Mudros. All the Cabinet were agreed that no time should be lost in discussing terms of armistice, and that if we get the Dardanelles open and free passage into the Black Sea for our troops, etc., hostilities with Turkey should be stopped. Delay in making actual peace must occur, as we have to consult our allies.

“We all lunched with the Prime Minister. I sat on his left at head of table.

“We resumed the Cabinet meeting at 2.45 p.m. and did not rise till after 6 p.m. The Prime Minister said it was the longest Cabinet meeting he had known of any Cabinet.”

Haig returned to France next day, and on the following one, the 23rd, General Pershing came to luncheon. He enquired as to Haig's views on the armistice terms and when he had heard them “he said that he agreed with me both as to the state of the enemy and the state of the allied armies and as to what our demands should be. As to the American Army, he also concurred in thinking that it would be next autumn before it could be organised and sufficiently trained to be able to play an important part.”

On the following day, at an interview with Foch, Haig repeated his views. “Foch said that he insisted on having bridgeheads across the Rhine, and on occupying all German territory on the left bank as a guarantee to ensure that the enemy carries out the terms of peace which will be imposed upon her. He tried to make out that the enemy on the eastern side of the Rhine, opposed by three allied bridgeheads, is in a less favourable position for battle than if he were astride the river holding the German frontier of

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1870. Of course the contrary is the case; indeed the unfavourable frontier was the main reason why Moltke urged the annexation of Metz and district in 1871. On the whole, Foch's reasons were political not military, and Lawrence and I were both struck by the very unpractical way in which he and Weygand regarded the present military situation. He would not ask himself, 'What does the military situation of the Allies admit of their demanding?' 'What terms can we really enforce?'

On October 25th, "I attended a conference at Marshal Foch's headquarters. There were also present Generals Pétain, Pershing, the latter's Chief of the Staff and Weygand.

"Foch stated that he had been directed by his Government to obtain the views of the Commanders-in-Chief on the terms of an armistice. He asked me to give my opinion first of all. I gave practically the same as I had given to the War Cabinet in London last Saturday. Pétain followed and urged the same terms as Foch, viz. the left bank of the Rhine with bridgeheads. Pershing, although two days previously he had acquiesced in my views, now said ditto to Foch. The latter then asked me if I had any further remarks to make. I said that I had no reason to change my opinion. I felt that the enemy might not accept the terms which Foch proposed because of military necessity only—and it would be very costly and take a long time (perhaps two years) to enforce them, unless the internal state of Germany compels the enemy to accept them. We don't know very much about the internal state of Germany—and to try to impose such terms seems to me really a gamble which may come off or it may not. It struck me, too, that the insistence of the two French generals on the left bank of the Rhine means that they now aim at getting hold of the Palatinate as well as of Alsace Lorraine. Pétain spoke of taking a huge

## VICTORY

indemnity from Germany, so large that she will never be able to pay it. Meantime French troops will hold the left bank of the Rhine as a pledge."

Hearing after this conference that Pershing had resented some of the remarks that he had made concerning the American Army, Haig hastened to correct the false impression:

"Paris, 27 Oct. —18.

"Dear General Pershing,

I have just heard that some of the remarks which I made at the conference at Senlis on Saturday, in French, were misinterpreted so as to give an idea of 'failure' to the work of the American Army since it came to France. I write at once to correct this most incorrect impression of what I said. I yield to no one in my admiration for the grand fighting qualities of the American soldier and the manner in which you and your staff have overcome the greatest difficulties during the past year. So such an idea has never entered my head."

He went on to explain that he had been anxious not to minimise difficulties. "Foremost among these difficulties is that of creating enough American armies to make up for the rapidly dwindling numbers of the French and British in the field."

Pershing replied:

"My dear Marshal Haig,

I thank you for your very courteous note, and for your complimentary remarks about the American Army. I am sure there was no intention of creating the impression that your words as interpreted seemed to convey and I am more than satisfied with the official correction that you have made.

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“The very delightful relations that have always existed between us and between British and American officers and men everywhere are most gratifying to all Americans.

“With warm personal and official regards,

I remain yours very sincerely,

John J. Pershing.”

With regard to the terms of the armistice it was the view of Foch that prevailed, and no representative of the British Army was present when, in the very early hours of Monday morning, November 11th, the German delegates surrendered to the French Generalissimo in the Forest of Compiègne. Much, however, had happened in the immediately preceding days to strengthen the hand of the Allies. The collapse of Bulgaria, Turkey and Austria was complete. The Kaiser had abdicated and Germany was on the brink of revolution. These events had not altered Haig's opinion as to the terms which should be imposed. The milder conditions which he had recommended would have secured to the Allies a sufficiently powerful position during the period that divided the armistice from the signature of the peace treaty, and it is possible that if the defeated foe had been spared that first humiliation he might have proved more tractable both at the time and during the years that followed.

But now the war was over, and the soldier's work was done. Haig's diary ends abruptly on November 11th. There is no trite moralising, no smug expression of self-satisfaction, no paean of triumph over the great victory. What he had further to say upon the subject was said that night upon his knees.

## Chapter XXVII

### PEACE

It has already been seen that Haig's views with regard to the Armistice were disregarded; his views with regard to the peace treaty were never asked. International affairs had therefore ceased to concern him and all his mind was henceforth centred upon those problems that had to be solved at home.

One great convulsion of nature produces another. The earthquake is followed by the tidal wave. In human affairs the same law applies. It is no light thing to turn four million peaceful citizens, occupied only with domestic concerns—the weekly budget and the sporting news—into an army of trained warriors, accustomed to the sight and the expectation of sudden death. Nor is it a simple matter, when the peace is signed, to bid them throw away their weapons, forget their fearful experiences and contentedly revert to the humdrum existence of the past. The red flag of revolution was flying triumphantly in Russia, and during the years that followed the conclusion of the war the tide of revolution rose high in many lands, and the roar of its waves could be heard breaking ominously on the shores of the British Isles. Before 1914 the possibility of European war had been the ever-present skeleton at every feast. After 1918 its place was taken by the fear of revolution, a fear which, in Great Britain, was not dispelled until the collapse of the General Strike in 1926.

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There is no more promising material for the manufacturer of revolution than soldiers returning from the wars. They have grown careless of danger and accustomed to risks. The peace to which they have so long looked forward is likely to disappoint them. The homes are never worthy of the heroes. They see others who have not endured the same hardships enjoying greater prosperity, and they are easy to persuade that they have much to gain and little to lose from an upheaval of society.

The problem therefore of demobilising the Army in 1918 was one that demanded the most serious study and the most careful handling. It had already engaged the attention both of the British Government and the Commander-in-Chief.

More than twelve months before a scheme had been drawn up in the War Office and had been submitted to Haig for his approval. The official letter which he wrote upon this occasion affords one of the most striking proofs of his foresight and sagacity.

The Government had held the view that the most urgent task to be undertaken at the conclusion of peace would be the reconstruction of British industry. They therefore proposed to release first from the Army those men whose places in industry were awaiting their return, places which others without their qualifications could not occupy. These men were called pivotal men, and the system came to be known as "pivotalism". From the first Haig was opposed to it.

On October 3rd, 1917, he wrote to the War Office: "The procedure outlined in the War Office scheme of demobilisation possesses certain serious difficulties, while the principle on which the scheme itself is based is open to grave objection if a well-regulated and disciplined departure from France is to be carried into effect."

He went on to draw a picture of the situation that he imagined would exist when the war was over. The accuracy

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of his forecast was remarkable. There would follow, he said, an immediate relaxation of the bonds of discipline. Men's minds no longer occupied with fighting, no longer filled with the engrossing speculation as to their own survival, would immediately turn to more normal preoccupations, to their homes, their business and their future prospects. Competition to get out of the Army would be keen. Jealousy of the fortunate ones who were first to leave would be intense. Nerves, already frayed by war, would render men unduly excitable. Unrest would follow.

"The fullest use of the existing military machinery together with the co-operation of all ranks would", he wrote, "be essential if a disciplined demobilisation were desired." But the system proposed by the War Office "contemplates the entire breaking up of this organisation". He believed that the suggested demobilisation of pivotal men, wherever they happened to be and however long they had served, would prove fatal, and he strongly urged that the right principle was "demobilisation by complete formations". He recommended that "the departure of the troops be based on the length of service of a formation with an overseas force" rather than according to the War Office scheme, which he said was "based upon the necessity for a rapid reconstruction of the civil and commercial life of the United Kingdom, and hence anticipates the gradual dissolution of military formations into a mass of individuals whose date of repatriation is to be decided solely by trade classifications without any consideration of length of service overseas." He proceeded to enumerate the practical difficulties in the way of the plan and to emphasise his warning as to what he believed would be the consequences. But his suggestions were treated with contempt, his warnings were completely disregarded, and on November 5th, 1917, he was told that "the War Cabinet, who were informed of your views, have



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now approved the principles of the original scheme of demobilisation". The Prime Minister, who had distrusted his counsel in war, was not likely to listen to his policy in times of peace.

The result was precisely what Haig had anticipated. Men who had been prepared to die for their country were not prepared to watch others with shorter service to their credit getting an unfair start in the race for employment. Before the end of the year 1918 discontent was rife and there were ugly outbreaks among the troops both in France and in England.

In the month of January Winston Churchill succeeded Milner at the War Office and at once dealt vigorously with the situation. He was quick to appreciate that the whole system upon which demobilisation was based was unsound, and on further enquiry into the history of the matter he was astonished to find that all that had happened had been foretold by the Commander-in-Chief. He hastened to put things right before it was too late, to abolish the obnoxious system and to arrange for demobilisation to take place in future on the very lines which Haig had recommended from the first.

"It will be seen", he wrote, referring to Haig's letter of 1917, "that Sir Douglas Haig forecasted accurately the state of indiscipline and disorganisation which would arise in the Army if pivotalism, i.e. favouritism, were to rule in regard to the discharge of men. . . . It is surprising that the Commander-in-Chief's prescient warnings were utterly ignored, and the Army left to be irritated and almost convulsed by a complicated artificial system open at every point to suspicion of jobbery and humbug."

Owing to the prompt and efficient action that was taken further trouble was avoided and demobilisation was carried out with the minimum of friction. But Haig did not con-

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sider that the mere process of demobilisation terminated the claim that his men had on his care and devotion. Singleness of purpose is the clue to his character and the key to his greatness, and from the moment when the last gun was fired on that November morning, and the main object of his life had been fulfilled, there remained for him one duty only, to see that justice was done to the men who had served him so well. He had never had for them the winning smile, the gay gesture or the light and cheerful words that come so lightly to some men and that win the hearts of subordinates. His stark sincerity made it impossible for him to assume a carelessness he never felt, and the very depth of his emotions made him afraid to display them in a manner which he would have considered unbecoming in a soldier. Only to those who knew him intimately was ever revealed his great tenderness of heart. General Sir Noel Birch, who had been his Artillery Adviser since 1916, remembers an occasion when, before returning to England, Haig took leave of all the men and women who had done espionage work for the Allies in Belgium during the war. There were some seventy of them collected in one château for the occasion. "Some of the men were curés and the women were of every sort and description. He had tea with them and after tea he talked with each one separately, sympathised with them in their troubles and thanked them for all their hard work. Some of their tales made, indeed, sad telling. One woman was the last of a family; the Germans had shot the rest of them. It was pathetic to see how their faces lit up as he spoke words of comfort and sympathy to them. Driving away in the motor afterwards the Field Marshal was visibly upset. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Another incident occurred a few months later which reveals still more clearly both Haig's wealth of sympathy and

<sup>1</sup>From a letter by General Sir Noel Birch.

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his desire to conceal it. During his visit to Oxford in order to receive the honorary degree of LL.D. his old college, Brazenose, arranged some festivities at which many ex-service men were present. Some of these were private soldiers who had not yet recovered from their wounds and were wearing the light blue hospital uniform which was at that time so familiar a sight. Haig's manner with these men was abrupt and the words he spoke to them were few. When later his old friend and contemporary, Lord Askwith, suggested that he might have shown them more geniality, he confessed that the sight of them had caused such a lump in his throat that he was afraid that if he said more to them he would break down.

This deep concern for the welfare of the demobilised had occupied the mind of the Commander-in-Chief long before the conclusion of hostilities. On February 20th, 1917, he had written to the War Office:

"I have the honour to bring to the notice of the Army Council a matter which I consider requires immediate and careful examination and the earliest submission to the Government for action. I receive constant communications from private individuals representing the state of poverty and almost destitution to which many of our invalided wounded officers are reduced. A number of them, without any private means of their own, totally and permanently incapacitated by the nature of their wounds from earning a livelihood, are in receipt of a pension which is not sufficient to keep body and soul together, much less to afford them the small comforts which their physical infirmities demand and that their sacrifices in the service of their country have earned.

"In another category are officers invalided from the service partially disabled, and without private means, and months elapse before they receive any pension at all.

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“There is no system employed by which such officers who are invalided from the Army but who are fitted for sedentary occupation are given opportunities for employment in Government and other Offices or Works. Quite a number of these might be employed and thus release fit men to join the Army.

“For every one case that comes to my notice there must be a hundred equally hard cases of officers who suffer in silence.

“In order to deal with these sad and deserving cases, I should suggest that a special Government Department be formed, which should with tact and discretion devote its energies to the interests of the disabled officer. The following points require special attention:

“(1) The immediate award of pensions on being invalided from the service. The pension should commence on the day on which the officer’s Army pay ceases.

“(2) The pension awarded to be on a sliding scale ensuring that those officers, who are totally disabled and have no private means or no parents in a position to support them, should receive a pension sufficient to maintain them in reasonable comfort.

“(3) The provision of such remunerative employment for officers as is suitable to their individual physical strength.

“(4) The maintenance of a register of all officers invalided from the service on account of wounds or ill health, with a view to protecting them from want, and providing them with employment. This implies a corresponding register of employers.

“(5) A permanent supervision of the interests of each wounded officer invalided from the service with a view to providing medical benefits and for their welfare.

“I strongly urge that there should be no delay in dealing

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with this matter, which, if allowed to continue, will constitute a scandal of the greatest magnitude.”

A further instance both of his sympathy and of his foresight was contained in another letter which he wrote to the War Office in the following year on the subject of the army agents—firms such as those of McGrigors and Cox, who had had an exceptional strain thrown upon them by the great increase in the size of the Army.

In this letter he reminded the War Office that officers not only received their pay through these agents, but also banked with them and in many instances kept all their savings and securities with them, and he emphasised what a grave disaster it would be to those officers if any of the army agents proved unequal to their heavy task. He ended by urging the War Office to look into the position and to keep it under continual review in order to ensure that officers' interests in this connection were adequately protected.

The subsequent history of some of the agents concerned proved that Haig's fears were not without foundation.

It was only a few days after the Armistice that the first official offer of reward reached him. The Prime Minister telegraphed suggesting a viscountcy. That this was another attempt to belittle the services of the British Commander-in-Chief cannot be doubted. Nobody ever possessed a keener or more exact sense of the value of honours than Lloyd George. A viscountcy had been awarded to French after the Battle of Loos. It is the normal reward which the least distinguished Secretary of State can claim on retirement. To offer it in the hour of the greatest victory that the British Army had ever achieved to the man who had commanded that Army for three years and who had refused a similar offer eighteen months before was an insult both to the man and to the Army. There is, however, nothing in Haig's letters or in his recorded utterances to show that he looked

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upon it in that light. He refused the proffered honour because he had made up his mind that he would accept nothing until he was satisfied that adequate provision had been made for the men and officers who had served under him. When the offer was increased to an earldom he refused it again, and only gave way when it was pointed out to him that all the other recipients of war honours were about to receive them and that it would be difficult to explain why his name alone was omitted. He therefore accepted because he had no wish to make himself unnecessarily conspicuous, to render the position of others uncomfortable or to court an easy popularity. The earldom was accompanied by a grant of £100,000, which can hardly be considered excessive when it is remembered that Wellington was given £2000 a year for life when the Peninsular War was only half over, and that that sum was made up to half a million together with a dukedom *before* the Battle of Waterloo. The purchasing power of money was at that period greater than it is to-day, taxation was negligible and there were no death duties, under which more than a third of the sum granted to Haig was reclaimed by the Exchequer within ten years.

Another suggestion which the Prime Minister put forward at this time was that Haig's official return to London should coincide with a great reception which it had been arranged that the British Government should give to Foch on December 1st. In a letter to a cousin Haig wrote, "I may tell you privately that I considered it an insult to be asked by your Prime Minister to return to London with a crowd of foreigners and on a Sunday too! What would my Army have said about the first, and my Scottish friends about the second? So I said I would not come unless I was ordered."

It was arranged therefore that the Commander-in-Chief, together with his army commanders, should be welcomed

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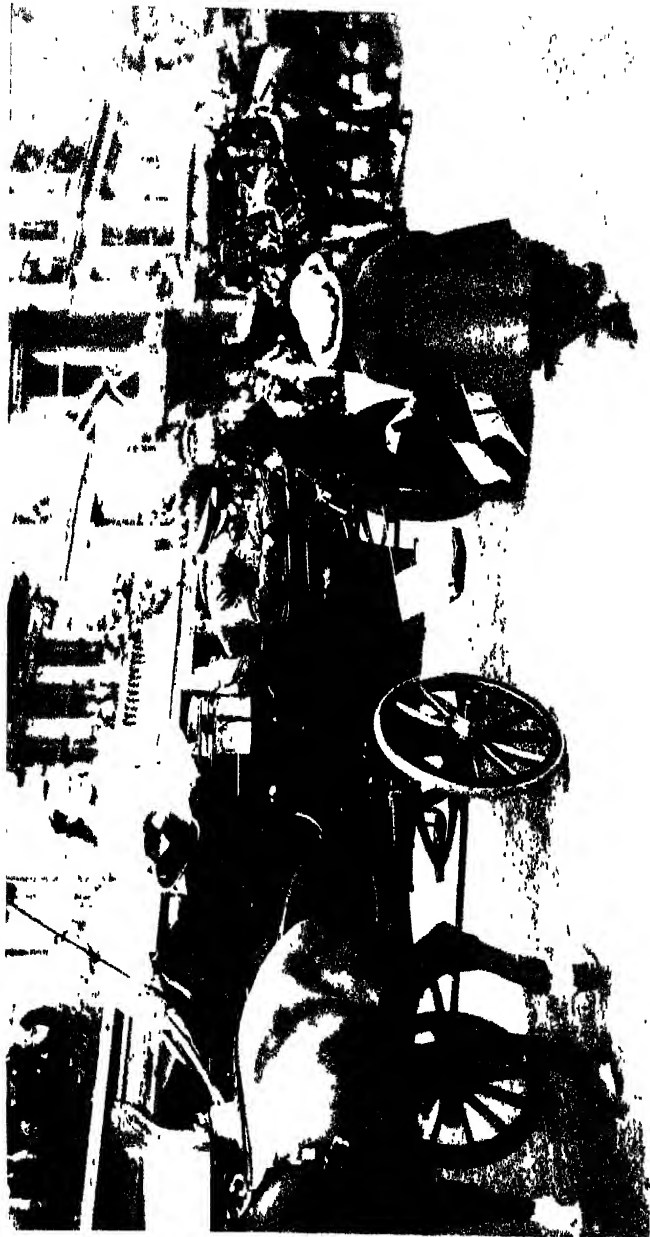
back to England on December 19th. Haig was anxious that they should ride from the station to Buckingham Palace, where they were to be entertained at luncheon. It seemed to him ridiculous that soldiers should drive in carriages "like a party of politicians or old women". But his wishes were overruled and he was compelled to drive. At Charing Cross he was officially met by the Duke of Connaught and the Prime Minister, and also by such old friends as Mr. Asquith and Sir Evelyn Wood, and, when his carriage reached the entrance to Marlborough House in Pall Mall, he found Queen Alexandra waiting there with his wife and daughters.

That evening he returned to his house on Kingston Hill, where at night an impromptu torchlight procession took place, some ten thousand people having collected to do spontaneous homage to their victorious Commander-in-Chief.

Haig spent Christmas at home with his family for the first time for four years. During the early months of the new year he was busily occupied, his presence being required sometimes in London, sometimes in Paris and sometimes with the army abroad. In March he conducted Lady Haig and her sister, Lady Worsley, over an extensive tour of the battlefields, revisiting many places which he had not seen since the early days of the war.

On April 2nd he handed over his command to Plumer, and having said goodbye to Poincaré, Clemenceau and Pétain in Paris and to Pershing at Chaumont, he finally sailed from Boulogne on April 5th.

He was singularly quiet, even for him, during the passage to Folkestone. And he was not cheerful. The task was accomplished and the work complete, but no man of broad humanity and deep religious feeling could look back upon the events of the last four years without feelings of pro-



QUEEN ALEXANDRA, WITH LADY HAIG AND HER TWO  
DAUGHTERS, STOPPING HAIG'S CARRIAGE,  
DEC 1914





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found melancholy. He may have remembered at that moment the asperity with which the Duke of Wellington once corrected a lady who was exclaiming what a fine thing a great victory must be—"No, no, Madam," said the Duke, "there is no greater tragedy in the world than a victory—except a defeat". And on this last voyage home with his wife beside him he must have reflected on the many soldiers who had never made that voyage, nor seen their wives again.

He was not yet fifty-eight, his health seemed robust and there was no reason for supposing that his career was over. Great posts exist within the British Empire which cannot be filled more worthily than by distinguished soldiers with glorious careers behind them. There was talk of the Governor-generalship of Canada and of the Viceroyalty of India as suitable positions for the victorious Field Marshal. But Haig's mind was made up. So long as the Army required his services he would continue to render them. While the troops were still returning from France and the work of demobilisation was being completed he could be useful as Commander-in-Chief of the Home Forces, but as soon as that work was done he would make way for younger men. Then one task and one only remained for him—to protect the interests of his fellow soldiers, to become the servant of those who had served him.

About this time he began once more to keep a diary, but his post-war diary resembled his pre-war ones, rather than the one he had written during the war. It was kept spasmodically and finally, as his work once more increased and his leisure diminished, it faded completely away. He describes how on April 8th he had an interview with the King when the proposal to abolish all full dress for the Army came under discussion, His Majesty disliked the suggestion that the Brigade of Guards should be clad permanently in

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khaki. Haig agreed. "I gave my opinion", he writes, "that so long as we had a voluntary army it would be necessary to clothe troops smartly, pay them well and amuse them with games, etc. Otherwise we won't get the necessary number of recruits."

At the same interview he discussed with the King the future of the Church of England. This was a subject upon which he had always felt strongly. On July 22nd, 1917, the Archbishop of York (now Archbishop of Canterbury) had visited his headquarters in France and had spoken to him "about the necessity of opening the doors of the Church of England wider. I agreed and said we ought to aim at organising a great Imperial Church to which all honest citizens of the Empire could belong. In my opinion Church and State must advance together and hold together against those forces of revolution which threaten to destroy the State."

On this occasion, nearly two years afterwards, "I urged the King to press for the formation of a great-minded Imperial Church, to embrace all our Churches, except the Roman Catholics. This would be the means of binding the Empire together. In my opinion the Archbishop of Canterbury had missed his opportunity during the war, and not a moment's time should be lost now in getting to work and organising an imperial body of control, consisting of bishops, moderators, etc. . . . Empires of the past had disappeared because there was no church or religion to bind them together. The British Empire will assuredly share the same fate at no distant date unless an Imperial Church is speedily created to unite us all in the service of God."

The exclusion of the Roman Catholics from this oecumenical ideal was not due to any prejudice against them on his part, but simply to the knowledge, acquired from experience, that no compromise was to be looked for from them. How far he was from being a bigoted Presbyterian

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was proved by his attitude towards the Prayer Book controversy. He was in Scotland when the matter first came before the House of Lords, but because he believed it to be his duty to be present he travelled to London and sat throughout both days of the debate in order that he might hear the arguments fairly stated. Having heard them he had no doubts as to his own decision and voted in favour of the Revised Book, although this was not the view of a single Scottish or Ulster Presbyterian member of the House of Commons.

“On April 15th”, he writes, “I took over the command of the Home Forces in Great Britain with G.H.Q. in the Horse Guards.

“I arrived there about 10.30 a.m. and found Sir William Robertson waiting for me. He had nothing to hand over. The Army in England was a very heterogeneous affair. His chief anxiety was labour trouble. This for the time being had been settled.

“After Robertson had gone I sent for my C.G.S. (Major-General Romer, of the Dublin Fusiliers) and discussed his method of working the command and the office. As regards the latter I urged that the hours of work should be shortened both for staff officers and clerks. He quite agreed and is to lay down that the hours will be 9.30 to 6 p.m. Even this I think can be reduced for a number of them.”

In May he was the central figure in what was practically a triumphal tour through Scotland. He received the freedom of the principal cities, honours from the ancient universities, and on May 14th delivered his rectorial address to the students of the University of St. Andrews. This address began with a comparison between the position of Athens at the height of her power and that of the British Empire. He insisted on the many points of similarity and showed how closely the famous speech of Pericles applied to modern

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conditions. He went on to make a plea for that broader, imperial church of which he dreamed and concluded by insisting upon the importance of character as the basis of Empire.

"We have won," he concluded, "and if my reading of history and current events is correct we have won because our national character is sound; because it is founded in honesty and love of justice, inspired by comradeship and self-sacrifice, secured by a great capacity for common action in pursuit of high ideals. Let us do our best to keep it so and to hand it on strengthened to our children. So long as our national character remains unchanged we shall always win in all we undertake. It is the sword and buckler of our Empire."

These were three weeks of crowded days for Haig.<sup>1</sup> Often he had to make as many as four speeches in a day, but the spontaneous and heartfelt welcome given to him by the people of his native land was reward more than sufficient.

"Everywhere", he wrote afterwards, "I was received with the most touching and loving enthusiasm by *all classes*. My countrymen have indeed made me feel that I occupy a warm place in everyone's heart."

In July the peace was signed, and on the 19th of that month there took place the great peace procession through the streets of London. Haig was ill that day, he had a high temperature and doubted whether he would have the strength to sit his horse throughout the procession. But Foch was there, Pershing was there, and it would have been a sad thing if the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army had been absent. So once more he made the effort that duty demanded of him, and few were aware how much it had

<sup>1</sup>A full account has been given by Lady Haig in *A Scottish Tour* published in aid of the Poppy Factory in Edinburgh.



HAIG IN THE PEACE PROCESSION, 19 JULY 1918  
*Central Press Photos Ltd.*



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cost him, although he had almost to be lifted from his saddle when the procession was over. And even then his day's work was not done.

In the midst of the universal rejoicings on that great day of triumph, when the final victory was being celebrated throughout the land, while rewards and honours were being heaped upon those who had deserved them, one man sat alone, unhonoured, unrewarded and unthanked. From his house in Queen Anne's Gate Lord Haldane could see the crowds that thronged St. James's Park and hear the cheers that rent the air as the heroes of the day passed by. Since the beginning of the war he had become the best-hated man in England for no better reason than that he loved German philosophy and had once said, in a phrase which was never forgotten, that Germany was his spiritual home. So violent at times had the feeling grown against him, encouraged by the lowest organs of the press, that he had been insulted in the street, that his house was protected by the police and that his servants had been warned to be careful whom they admitted. So it was that as he sat alone that evening while the shadows were falling in the park and the crowds beginning to disperse, his servant came to inform him that there was an officer below in uniform who wished to see him, but that as he would give no name he had hesitated to let him in. Haldane with a weary shrug told the man to show the officer up, and Haig walked into the room.

He had brought with him as a gift a copy of his recently printed War Despatches. He was as tongue-tied and abrupt as ever, never mentioned that he was feeling very ill and left almost immediately. It was only after he had gone that Haldane opened the volume and found that it was inscribed "To the greatest Secretary of State for War England ever had".



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The incident should silence for ever those who have accused Haig of lack of heart or of imagination. Only a man who possessed both those qualities in a high degree could have realised what Haldane would be feeling on that day, and how upon that day the tribute that he wished to pay him would be of greater value than at any other date.

Despite the popular rejoicings at the conclusion of peace, there was ever present during this summer of 1919 the spectre of serious industrial unrest and all that lay beyond it. Soon after Haig's return from Scotland, Sir Basil Thomson, the head of the Intelligence Section of the Home Office, had called on him to "discuss arrangements for getting information of internal unrest. As regards the troops I said that I would not authorise any men being used as spies. Officers must act straightforwardly and as Englishmen. Espionage amongst our own men was hateful to us army men. The position was different during the war when all sorts and kinds of people were sent to France in uniform. They were not all soldiers, nor in fighting units. Now we were going back to the small, professional army. This must be made a happy home for all ranks. Thomson's machinery for getting information of sedition must work independently of the Army and its leaders."

When in the autumn the possibility of a general strike became serious he summoned a meeting of the heads of the various Commands to discuss the situation. He found all plans were ready to deal with any difficulties that might arise. "I directed", he wrote, "amongst other matters that troops should be kept concealed as long as possible, and should only appear when the civil authorities required their help. As soon as the necessity for action was over the troops must at once be withdrawn out of sight. Troops must be armed and act as soldiers. It is not their duty to act as policemen as they did in the police strike recently in Liverpool—

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some men were armed with halves of their entrenching tools.”

The view that troops should be used only in the last resort, that they should not be paraded as a menace, which is more likely to prove an irritant, and that when they are employed it should be in their true capacity as soldiers and not as auxiliary policemen, is undoubtedly sound doctrine. Fortunately there was no need to put it into practice that autumn. The railway strike, which appeared at one moment formidable, passed off peacefully, and when in the month of October Haig's family was increased by another daughter he christened her Irene, for it seemed to him that peace had come at last.

Early in the new year, 1920, it was decided to abolish the post of Commander-in-Chief of the Home Forces, a post which had only existed during the war, a decision which automatically brought Haig's appointment to an end.

The Secretary of State wrote to him as follows:

War Office,  
30 *January* 1920.

“My dear Field Marshal,

As you are giving up your command to-morrow, I write by desire of all my colleagues on the Army Council to express to you on their behalf our enduring sense of the illustrious services which you have rendered to the British Army in the war and of the great assistance which you have given to the War Office and to the Government during your tenure of the post of Commander-in-Chief, Forces in Great Britain. It is a source of keen satisfaction to us, and to me personally, to know that though you will be for the time being enjoying a well-earned period of leisure, your gifts and experience remain at the disposal of the British Army and of the State.

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"I am giving directions that a Special Army Order, embodying the sense of this letter, shall be read to the troops.

"Again, with warm thanks for your many personal kindnesses to me,

Believe me,

Yours very sincerely

Winston S. Churchill."

Henry Wilson, still occupying the position of Chief of Imperial General Staff, also wrote:

36 Eaton Place,

S.W.

Saturday night

Jan. 31, 1920.

"My General,

It seems so odd your leaving soldiering even though it may be temporarily. The years run by at an alarming pace and at an increasingly alarming pace, and it seems only yesterday that you came to the War Office from Simla, and it seems only last night that we went to France for the great War.

"If any man can be proud and content with the part he played in that final test you most certainly are that man; and whether you serve again or whether you don't you have that supreme comfort for the rest of your time.

"And so goodnight but please not goodbye.

Ever

Henry."

This meant for Haig the practical end of his military career. As a Field-Marshal, however, he remained on the active list of the Army, and he felt no regret at quitting the post which he had filled during the past year. The possibility of having to use troops in the suppression of civil disorder is always hateful to a soldier. It was doubly hateful to Haig, who knew that if such disorder arose he might be

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driven to employing force against some of the very men who had fought for him in France, and to whose assistance and protection he intended to devote the remainder of his life.

Now that he no longer occupied an official position his hands were free and his time was at his own disposal. But the task that faced him was not an easy one. It had been considerably complicated by the honest efforts of those who had already tried their hands at it. Before the end of the war there had come into existence more than one organisation for the protection of the interests of those who had fought in it. Of these the two principal were the "National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Soldiers and Sailors" and the "Comrades of the Great War". In the uncertain state of national affairs that then existed there was considerable danger that these and similar powerful organisations might be tempted to play an important part in politics and to seek by political pressure to obtain their private ends. The former of the two associations mentioned above had assumed a definitely left-wing outlook, and refused to admit officers to membership. The Comrades had, on the other hand, a predominantly conservative bias.

Haig had already interested himself, together with Sir Frederick Maurice, in the formation of the Officers' Association, which they had determined should be free of any political complexion, and which, it was hoped, might serve as an intermediary to bring the Comrades and the National Federation together. It was on account of this movement that he was obliged, or rather that he obliged himself, to abandon a holiday which he had planned to take on the termination of his appointment. He had hoped to visit his cousin, Mrs. Haig Thomas, who had taken a villa at St. Jean de Luz. On January 30th, however, he wrote to her: "Both Doris and I were so looking forward to a trip abroad

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but we have had to give it up. To-morrow my appointment as C. in C. Home Forces is abolished and I am already very busy organising an 'Officers' Association'. To-day I took part in a great meeting at the Mansion House to launch the scheme and raise funds. You will see all about the meeting in the papers of to-morrow, but I enclose a copy of a little pamphlet we issued before the meeting as it summarises what we are doing. In view of all this I cannot well go off abroad and leave my work to be performed by others.

"I spent last week visiting Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield and Hull. Each place gave me a great reception and I duly rubbed in the shortcomings of many of the employers in not taking on more ex-service men. Some of course have done more than their share and have 20%, whereas we only want them all to take 5%. In the West Riding 25% of the employers have taken on 9000 ex-service men. There are still 4000 in that area out of work and 75% of the employers still available to do it. Nearly all of them in that part have made great fortunes, so we are not asking very much really."

So it was that, on the abolition of his appointment and the end of his official career, Haig's first act was to postpone a holiday to which he had been looking forward in order to undertake fresh work on behalf of his fellow soldiers. Henceforward that work became unremitting, and it would probably not be an exaggeration to say that at no period of his life did he work harder than during the last years of it. Nor was the work congenial to him. He had loved the profession of arms, and had delighted both in the study and practice of it. But now he was condemned to spend long hours at the writing table, varied by visits of ceremony and the making of speeches. Public speaking is a strain even on those to whom it comes easily; but for those who hate it, as Haig did, it is pain and travail. He had never been fluent

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either in conversation or on the platform, and he was too old to learn new tricks; but speaking was now demanded of him wherever he went, and during these years he visited every town of importance in the country. He would not spare himself. In France he had kept regular hours throughout the war and taken regular exercise, for he knew it to be his duty to keep himself physically fit for the great task he had to perform. But now he would sit far into the night replying to a host of correspondents—old soldiers and widows of old soldiers who brought their troubles to him with the certain knowledge that they would not be neglected.

His old friend and medical adviser throughout the war, Colonel Ryan, on one occasion warned him solemnly that he was overworking and that the consequences might be serious. He suggested at the same time that his labours would be considerably lightened if he would dictate his letters instead of writing them all with his own hand. Haig replied that he thought people preferred to get letters written in his own hand, that in many cases there was so little he could do for those who appealed to them and that he believed in maintaining the human touch.

The importance of the human touch and the weight of a strong personality were responsible for the great work which he now accomplished. When Colonel Crosfield approached him on behalf of the Comrades of the Great War with the request that he would take over the presidency of that organisation, he replied without a moment's hesitation that he would do nothing of the kind. He could not bear to see two bodies of ex-service men in competition, and often in acrimonious competition, with one another. Let them make up their differences, let them unite and he would gladly put himself at the head of the united body.

Colonel Crosfield says that Haig seemed to him at the

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time to underestimate the difficulties that lay in the way of carrying out his suggestion. When there exist two separate organisations, each possessing branches in many parts of the country, each branch employing its little band of officials and each branch bitterly competing with its rival, it is easy to point out the obvious advantages of amalgamation; but it is as difficult to persuade them to amalgamate as it was to persuade the Capulets to embrace the Montagus.

Haig brought to the task, in addition to his great name and position and his reputation for fair dealing, the fact that he had in July 1919 given evidence before a House of Commons Committee on Pensions which had produced a profound impression on ex-service men throughout the country. It had also induced the Government to introduce radical changes in the rates and methods of granting pensions which had very materially benefited the recipients.

When, therefore, Haig had to address a meeting of the National Federation at Leicester, the audience, although at first disinclined to accept his advice, were at last convinced both of his sincerity and of his practical sympathy. There are occasions when bad speakers can produce a greater impression than good ones. Parnell seldom spoke well, but seldom failed to produce his effect. The reason generally given is that he meant what he said. The same was certainly true of Haig, and on this occasion he succeeded in a task which it is given to but few orators ever to accomplish—he changed the mind of an audience and won assent to his own views.

So it was that at the end of June 1921 the British Legion came into being, and united in one body the National Federation, the Comrades of the Great War, the Officers' Association and another organisation entitled the National Association. It is not too much to say that without Haig's efforts this great work could not have been accomplished.

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Ex-service men are aware of how much they owe to the British Legion, but the ordinary citizen hardly realises how many difficulties and dangers were averted by the unification of these various bodies and the salvation of them all from being dragged into the political arena.

Just as the new organisation owed its existence to the strength of Haig's personality, so during the early years of its existence—and the early years of an institution are as important in the formation of its character as are the early years of an individual—was the British Legion moulded into the shape which Haig desired. Unity, comradeship and peace were his watchwords, unity between all ex-service men working in a spirit of comradeship and maintaining peace not only within their own ranks, but in the community at large.

It is interesting to note that he never attempted, as he might easily have done, to assume dictatorial powers in a position where they would probably have been gladly accorded to him. It would not have been surprising if one whose whole career and whole outlook had been so strictly military had allowed something of the regimental tradition to creep into the control and discipline of this new body of which he was the head. But, on the contrary, he was only anxious that in the Legion the old hierarchy should be forgotten and that the constitution should be as democratic as that of any other body of free men who associate together for purposes of mutual advantage. Having, however, secured his first objective of bringing ex-officers and men into the same organisation, he realised that, if steps were not taken to prevent it, the control of the different branches and of the organisation itself was likely to drift into the hands of those who had held commissions. Therefore to ignore the previous position of men who joined the Legion, which on the face of it appeared the more democratic method,



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would, in practice, probably defeat the very end that it had in view.

“Really,” he wrote to Colonel Crosfield on March 14th, 1922, “there *ought* to be no question of ‘rank’ in the Legion—we are all ‘comrades’. That however is not possible and so we must legislate to ensure that the ‘other ranks’ are adequately represented.”

He was above all things anxious that the human sympathy, which his own heart felt so deeply and which his own tongue could so ill express, with those who had fought for their country and had fallen upon evil days should be the prevalent and the abiding spirit in all the activities of the British Legion. On September 23rd, 1923, he wrote to Colonel Crosfield, with whom up to the day of his death he was in continual correspondence concerning the affairs of the Legion: “As charitable organisations develop and their machinery becomes more systematised, so do they act ‘according to regulation’ and lose sympathy with the unfortunate who need help. So we must guard against this and I think occasionally change the subordinates who interview the needy ones, replacing them by others who have more recently felt the pinch of poverty and can appreciate more the value of a kindly word.”

These are hardly the words of a man who lacked imagination—of a man who was a good soldier and nothing else.

Haig’s activities on behalf of ex-service men were not, however, limited to Great Britain or to the British Legion. The army that he had commanded had been, as he had never forgotten, an imperial army, and he was most anxious that the same principles which prevailed among ex-service men at home should extend to those who had come from and returned to the Dominions overseas.

Difficulties precisely similar to those which had been encountered at home existed overseas. There, as here, a large

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number of separate organisations had come into being and had asserted their existence by quarrelling between themselves. Haig's objects were first, to form one single association in each Dominion on the lines of the British Legion, and then to unite all such associations in one great British Empire Service League. The first link of this imperial chain was forged in South Africa, which Haig visited at the beginning of 1921. In that country there were already four separate associations in existence, and the obstacles to persuading them to collaborate were considerable; but Haig succeeded in South Africa as he had succeeded at home. His personality, his persistence and his sincerity enabled him to accomplish what it is doubtful whether anybody else could have accomplished. The four South African associations became one, and the British Empire Service League came into existence in the land which Haig had not visited since he left it at the conclusion of the Boer War twenty years before.

He and Lady Haig enjoyed their journey. They visited all the principal towns of South Africa and rode over many of the battlefields. At Bloemfontein he unveiled a war memorial, and he stayed for a few days with General Smuts in the same house where, during the South African War, he had stayed with Cecil Rhodes.

Four years later, in 1925, he paid a similar visit to Canada. Here the difficulties that he encountered were greater even than those that had faced him in South Africa. There, there had been four separate ex-service men's associations—here, there were fourteen. In a series of interviews, however, with the leaders of these different bodies he won them all over to his own view, and at the end of three days a great meeting took place at Ottawa, when these same leaders surrendered into his hands their charters and their seals, "evidence of their desire for unity and as an act of faith in his

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leadership". Having thus successfully concluded the real object of his visit he was the better able to enjoy a tour across the whole width of the continent, being hospitably entertained wherever he went, and meeting again his old comrade, Lord Byng, who was at that time Governor-General of the Dominion.

He fully intended to pay similar visits to Australia and New Zealand, but it was not to be.

Such leisure as Haig allowed himself during the last years of his life was spent, whenever he could so arrange it, at Bemersyde. This ancient house had belonged to a member of the Haig family since time immemorial; and his fellow countrymen, who contributed to purchase it from the Haig who was holding it at the time and to present it to the most distinguished bearer of the name, could have given him nothing that he would have valued so highly.

Years before he had written to a nephew from South Africa: " 'Aim high,' as the Book says, 'perchance ye may attain.' Aim at being worthy of the British Empire and possibly in the evening of your life you may be able to own to yourself that you are fit to settle down in Fife."<sup>1</sup> He himself had aimed high, he had attained, he had been worthy of the British Empire, and he certainly deserved peace in the evening of his life amidst the beloved and legend-haunted scenery of the Scottish border. Often he would say during these last years that he demanded nothing more than to be allowed to sit by his "ain fireside".

He had always retained in his speech traces of his Scottish origin, and those who have read closely the extracts from his diary will have noted that he never overcame the Scotsman's difficulty in correctly handling the words "shall" and "will" and "should" and "would". Now the love of his native land became more dominant. Relations, who had

<sup>1</sup>See vol. i, p. 92.



Victoria, B.C.

Keene's

13 July  
1925.

Facing the  
Camera as before  
Landing!

Haig. G.H.

HAIG FACING THE CAMERAS BEFORE  
LANDING AT VICTORIA, B.C., 13 JULY 1925



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seen little of him since he went out into the world and were prepared to regard their great kinsman with awe, found a refreshing simplicity in his conversation. He seemed like one of themselves who had stayed at home, who had never been to Oxford or Sandhurst, or travelled all over the world, or commanded great armies, or moved familiarly in kings' courts.

Wit he had never aspired to, but he was not lacking in the dry humour of his race. One or two instances may be given.

When Lord Trenchard was commanding the Royal Flying Corps in France he was frequently requested to bomb Don Bridge, which was situated in the vicinity of Douai. Although these commands were invariably carried out, the bridge, which was a small one, seemed to continue to serve its purpose, a fact upon which the Commander-in-Chief occasionally commented.

During the advance in 1918, when Trenchard was no longer with the British Army but was commanding the Independent Force at Nancy, he received one evening a laconic telegram from Haig—"I rode over Don Bridge to-day."

There are several charming accounts in Sir William Orpen's *An Onlooker in France* of the impression which the Commander-in-Chief made upon the painter. "Whenever it became my honour to be allowed to visit him," he writes, "I always left feeling happier—feeling more sure that the fighting men being killed were not dying for nothing. One felt he knew, and would never allow them to suffer and die except for final victory. When I started painting him he said 'Why waste your time painting me? Go and paint the men. They're the fellows who are saving the world, and they're getting killed every day.'"

On one occasion after Orpen had been lunching at head-

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quarters and before he had left the building "a most violent explosion went off, all the windows came tumbling in, and there was great excitement, as they thought the Boche had spotted the Chief's whereabouts. The explosions went on and out came the Chief. He walked straight up to me, laid his hand on my shoulder and said: 'That's the worst of having a fellow like you here, Major. I thought the Huns would spot it' and, having had his joke, went back to his work."<sup>1</sup>

Maurice Baring was another temporary officer with whom Haig formed a friendship. As A.D.C. to Trenchard he was a frequent visitor at G.H.Q. and Haig christened him Nicodemus, for what reason Maurice Baring never knew, but suspected some confusion in the Commander-in-Chief's mind between the personalities of Nicodemus and Silenus. After the war Maurice Baring once attended a levée at St. James's in court dress. Haig was standing beside the throne. After Baring had made his bow, but before he left the palace, a note was handed him which ran—"Nicodemus. Your stocking is coming down. Haig. F.M."

It is curious, but not surprising, that Haig's true character should have been more easily understood by artists and by men of letters than by his fellow soldiers. Recollections of the parade ground are bound to leave a lingering mist of awe between a very highly placed officer and his subordinates, which it is difficult for a shy and untalkative man to dissipate. F. S. Oliver was another writer who came to know Haig during the war, and fortunately he has recorded his first impressions.

Writing to his brother from France during the battle of Passchendaele he says—"Of course the Commander-in-Chief is the central figure in the British Army in France, not merely from his position, but also, so far as my experi-

<sup>1</sup>*An Onlooker in France*, by Sir William Orpen, pp. 27-28.

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ence went, from the sheer greatness of his personality. He is a man of whom, in the earlier stages of his career, I had heard a great deal more harsh criticism than affectionate praise. I think this was partly due to the fact that when he went to India as Head of the Cavalry—about ten years ago, I think—he found officers sunk in a most incompetent sloth, and didn't hesitate to boot them out right and left, making thereby a large number of personal and hereditary enemies. But I think the chief reason is his obvious difficulty of finding words. Not only the small talk, which may not be supposed to interest him in itself, but also when he has got something very clear and urgent in his mind, and wishes to communicate it. This is a great handicap, as you may imagine, in the task of making the politicians understand his military aims; but it has the indirect effect of making people who meet him casually think him haughty and reserved, neither of which things he seems to me to be in the least. He is certainly shy, and modest also, although as self-confident a man as I ever met—a Scotsman through and through, not only by birth and domicile, but in accent and feature; most of all perhaps, a Scotsman in his manner of thought. He looks you straight in the face with a pleasant, kindly smile, which has at the same time a humorous, slightly ironical twinkle in it.

“I liked him from the first moment I saw him, and after spending a week under his roof, during which time he had both good luck and bad, grounds both for elation and for annoyance, I came away liking him far better than I had done at the beginning. You would like him too. You would like the way he throws back his handsome head and sticks out his chin when he gets at all excited. You would like his fierceness, and his gentleness mixed up with it.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*The Anvil of War*, pages 244, 245.



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And the following is Oliver's final verdict, written after the Armistice. "You remember what the Mousquetaires said about d'Artagnan—that they loved him more than any of the others. I feel just that about D. H. He isn't the greatest soldier that ever lived. He isn't inventive. He is too slow at getting rid of incompetents. He has old-fashioned ideas about the use of cavalry, etc. But he is a very great character—a perfectly true and simple-minded man, who sees the facts, and can't see the frills and theories. I daresay he often draws wrong conclusions—as even Napoleon did—but his feet are on the ground; he isn't whirling aloft like a withered leaf in the eddies of a theoretic gale.

"People often say that he is cold, stand-offish, self-seeking, etc. I simply don't know what they mean. I think he is about the least self-seeking creature I ever ran across. And certainly, as I see him, he is one of the warmest-hearted and most sympathetic. I've met and known fairly intimately most of the British bigwigs who are engaged in this war. As far as personal affection goes I put D. H. first. And he is perfectly trustworthy."<sup>1</sup>

Happy were the days that Haig now spent at Bemersyde, planning improvements of his new estate and often carrying them out with his own hands. But still the call of duty sounded and so long as there was breath in his body he was bound to obey that call. Everywhere the work of the Legion demanded his presence. His name alone was sufficient to solve problems and to settle disputes—his name which is still revered by members of the Legion beyond all others. Wherever he went speeches were demanded, the volume of correspondence did not decrease and he persisted in refusing to employ a secretary.

At the beginning of 1928 he was intending to take a short holiday in the south of France. He travelled from Bemersyde

<sup>1</sup>*The Anvil of War*, pages 306, 307.

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syde to London in order to attend a scout rally at Richmond on Saturday, January 28th. As usual a speech was demanded from him and it was noticed that in the middle of it he paused for a moment and turned deathly pale. He recovered immediately and afterwards made no complaint of feeling unwell. That day he wrote to Colonel Crosfield about an invitation he had received to become the patron of the Old Contemptibles' Association. "I think I should reply that as the Old Contemptibles are really part of the Legion, no patron seems necessary, and the Prince of Wales is really the patron of *all* ex-service men—and I hope he will insist on all Old Contemptibles joining the Legion as a section of a Legion Branch.

"I hope to see you on Tuesday at 10.30 a.m."

That was the last letter that he wrote. His last business was on behalf of the Legion. The handwriting is as vigorous as ever; there is no trace in it of old age or of infirmity. He was staying in his brother in law's house in Prince's Gate, which had been his London home for the greater part of his life. The next day was Sunday and he spent it quietly. After dinner and a game of cards he retired to rest. A little later groans were heard coming from his room, and his brother John, who was staying in the house, found him gasping for breath. In a few minutes all was over. The long strain of the war had told at last. That stout and steadfast heart had ceased to beat. If he knew that the end had come, he had the satisfaction of knowing also that his task was finished and that he had earned his rest.

The depth and the sincerity of the mourning throughout the Empire afforded proof, had any doubted it, of the place that Haig had won in the hearts of his fellow subjects. St. Paul's Cathedral seemed the appropriate burial place for so great a leader, but he had expressed a wish to lie in his own country, and his wish was respected. For two days the cof-

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fin lay in the church of St. Columba, where he had always worshipped when he was in London, and all day long an uninterrupted flow of mourners passed reverently by, in order to pay their last homage to the dead.

On February 3rd the official funeral took place, the service in Westminster Abbey, accompanied by all the pomp and pageantry that the obsequies of a Field-Marshal demand. The King's three eldest sons walked behind the gun carriage that bore the coffin. Prince Arthur of Connaught represented his father, the Senior Field-Marshal. Two Marshals of France, Foch and Pétain, were among the pall bearers, who included those who held the highest rank in the three fighting services.

That night, when the coffin reached Edinburgh, despite the lateness of the hour and the inclemency of the weather, an enormous crowd had assembled to receive it. Here among his own people the sorrow seemed more personal and more poignant. Not only had they been proud of him and of the great honour that he had brought them, but they loved him and understood him. Many were in tears.

The next day the body lay in state in St. Giles Cathedral, while from dawn to darkness the sorrowing crowds passed by. When the hour came for the Cathedral to be closed at the end of a cold, wet, February day, there was still more than a quarter of a mile of patient mourners, four abreast, waiting for admittance. The Cathedral remained open until they had all passed through.

The last scene was the simplest. On a plain farm cart drawn by four farm horses the coffin was carried from the station of St. Boswells to the Abbey of Dryburgh—five miles through the country that he knew so well, the valley of the Tweed under the shadow of the Eildon Hills. Finally he was laid to rest in the earth that covers the remains of Walter Scott, who once said of himself that he had always

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had a troop of horse galloping through his brain, and who would have welcomed the coming of a great cavalry leader to be his companion in that lovely, quiet spot.

Genius and greatness are qualities that defy definition. Men accord them more generously to their predecessors than to their contemporaries. They are right to do so, for as the picture recedes from our vision we can distinguish more clearly the true proportions of the various figures. Already as we read the history of the Great War and the mists created by prejudice, propaganda and false witness begin to scatter, the figure of Haig looms ever larger as that of the man who foresaw more accurately than most, who endured longer than most and who inspired most confidence amongst his fellows. Genius, if it were, as it was once defined, an infinite capacity for taking pains, Haig might lay claim to; but not according to any other definition. There is no action that he took, no sentence that he wrote nor one recorded utterance bearing the hallmark of that rare quality which puts certain men in a separate category, dividing them by a thin but unmistakable line from those who possess the highest talents.

Whether if military genius had existed upon either side it would have solved earlier and in some simpler fashion the problem of the western front must remain for ever a subject of speculation, to which no final answer can be given. Haig believed from the first that the German line could be broken and the German Army beaten in the way that that line was broken and that Army was beaten at last.

Before the war began he had not been consulted as to the part the British Army was to play in it, but studies of previous campaigns and the knowledge of our parliamentary system had persuaded him of the probability that during

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the early stages of a war on the Continent the British Army would find itself in retreat. He had therefore insisted, during the months when he was training the First Army Corps at Aldershot, on the "manoeuvre in retreat" being continually practised, which undoubtedly proved of vital importance to the officers and men who were compelled to take part in the inevitable retreat from Mons.

Throughout the early stages of the campaign he proved himself an exemplary corps commander, and no doubt existed either among civilians or in the Army as to who should succeed Sir John French at the end of 1915. Great as his services had been in the Sudan, in South Africa, in India and at the War Office, the final verdict upon his military career must rest on his performance during the three years that he held the position of Commander-in-Chief.

Supreme command is the supreme test, but in considering the military history of these three years it cannot be too strongly emphasised that at no moment was Haig in supreme command in the full sense of the term. His instructions, which remain on record, were definite that he was obliged to comply in all larger questions of strategy with the views of the French. And even without those instructions common sense would have compelled him to accept, so far as possible, the decisions of an ally in whose territory the war was being conducted and whose capital was in danger.

So it has been seen that the battle of the Somme was fought at the place and at the time that the French decided, although Haig would have preferred a different place and a later date. It has been shown too how in the following year the plans that he and Joffre had agreed upon were swept away on account of the French Government's confidence, short-lived as it proved, in a new commander, confidence which was abundantly shared by the British Prime Minister.

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When Nivelle had failed—Haig's share in his offensive proving the only part of it that was brilliantly successful—and when the French Army was in danger of collapsing, upon Haig fell the duty of holding the foe at bay. This, he frequently asserted later, was the most critical period of the war. If the Germans attacked the French all might be lost; therefore it was imperative that the British should attack the Germans. Once again the first stages of the attack succeeded and might have continued to succeed if the weather had not broken. And once again it was the French who never ceased to urge the continuance of the offensive. It is possible that it was prolonged unduly, but who shall say when the right moment had arrived for breaking off the battle? Military history is crowded with instances, and the Gallipoli campaign had afforded a recent one, of generals who missed their chances through failure to follow up initial success, to drive home a well-directed blow and to convert an indecisive into a decisive battle.

Now that evidence is available from German sources and we know what the autumn offensives of 1916 and 1917 cost the enemy, the most optimistic estimates which were made at the time from the allied standpoint are found to have been no exaggerations of the truth. How near the German Army was to defeat at the beginning of 1917 nobody realised, and the view is still held by many of the shrewdest judges, both in France and in England, that if Joffre and Haig had been allowed to pursue their plans the end might have come in that year.

In 1918, when, in spite of Haig's protests, the western front was denuded of troops and the British line was lengthened, the Germans scored a victory that might have seriously affected the result of the war. The most important decision that Haig ever took was when he realised that the situation could only be saved by putting the two armies,

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the British and the French, under the same commander. So clearly did he see the facts, so swiftly did he decide, so successfully was his decision implemented, that a partisan might be pardoned for claiming that here at least was the evidence of genius. Clear vision, swift decision, efficient execution—can genius produce more in a man of action? Haig himself would have been the last to put forward such a claim and would have contented himself with quoting Field Service Regulations, Part I—“Sound military knowledge built up by study and practice until it has become an instinct.” And in truth genius does demand something more—that imponderable and undefinable increment which study and practice alone can never produce, for the fact was that Haig was as good a general as it is possible for a man without genius ever to become.

His opportunity arrived in the last three months of the war, and he made full use of it. The great battles of August and September that brought victory to the Allies were his battles, as much as Austerlitz was the battle of Napoleon or Blenheim the battle of Marlborough. Whenever he differed from Foch he was demonstrably in the right. His refusal after August 8th to go on battering his head against the Chaulnes-Roye front shows that he was not one who never knew when to stop nor one who would sacrifice the lives of his men unnecessarily.

He was the first to believe that victory must come in the autumn of 1918. He believed it in March of that year. The best-informed military and civilian opinion thought he was wrong, and in spite of his victories remained unconvinced until he had succeeded, with little support or encouragement from home, in proving he was right. Taking the whole war into review and remembering that he was engaged in it without intermission, from the beginning to the end, it may be affirmed with confidence that there is no

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soldier and no statesman whose record under examination would prove better, and it is extremely doubtful whether there is any whose record would prove as good. The only faults that have ever been attributed to him by reputable writers are merely the defects of the finest qualities. That he was too reluctant to change his advisers, that he was too hopeful on the eve and in the course of battle, and that being once engaged he was too slow to give up the fight—if each of these accusations has a grain of truth in it, they amount only to the fact that he possessed in too great a degree the essential military virtues of loyalty, courage and tenacity.

The differences of opinion on military policy, which during the last two years of the war caused friction between himself and the civil power, were such as are likely to arise in times of crisis between professional soldiers and the popularly elected representatives of a democracy. That Haig's views on strategy were sound it has been the main thesis of this book to prove. Seeing that they were held by the overwhelming majority of those whose lives had been devoted to the study of military science, to decide that they were all wrong and that the truth lay with the civilians would indeed be a melancholy conclusion.

Haig recognised that Ministers were entitled to their opinions, and he was fortunate in being able to maintain the most friendly relations with all the politicians who crossed his path, with one exception. In the exceptional case, what he found difficult to forgive were the methods that were employed against him by one whose motives he knew were the same as his own, to win the war. To his straightforward and direct intelligence it seemed incomprehensible that a man who distrusted him should continue to employ him. He was very clear in his own mind as to his constitutional position, and never threatened to resign his command be-



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cause he considered that he had no right to do so. He was the servant of the state, and so long as the state required his services he was bound to render them. If the state lost confidence in his abilities it was for the state to dismiss him, and we may be certain that he would have taken his dismissal without a word.

To a fellow soldier who thought he had been harshly treated by the Government, and with whom Haig sympathised, he wrote: "I strongly recommend you to remain quiet and not stir up an agitation, because, even though an officer has right on his side, it does not in the least mean that he will get what he wants. The Government has a perfect right to send any one of us away at a moment's notice without giving us any reason beyond saying that they are not satisfied with us. Indeed, if any authority finds he does not work in sympathy with any of his subordinates, he is perfectly justified, in the interests of the country, in dispensing with the services of that subordinate. I regard the conduct of the Government towards you in that light."

How little resentment he bore, how far was any thought of malice from his heart, is shown by the fact that in all the many speeches that he was compelled to make in the years that followed the war, he never allowed one word of recrimination to cross his lips, nor made a single bitter allusion to the past.

Greatness of character is something different from greatness of mind or of intellect. It is a quality that does not dazzle men, and it is one to which few men of genius, especially those who were also men of action, can lay claim. More often than not it must be its own reward, for it seldom leads to fame, or wealth, or power. But when it is possessed by one of those upon whose life the searchlight of history beats, it should command the homage of the historian. In moral stature Haig was a giant. It may be easy to

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find in history a more brilliant, it would be hard to find a better man. His life was dedicated, from the day that he left Oxford until the day that he died, to the service of his country, and his reward was the firm faith which the majority of his countrymen reposed in so loyal a servant. The nine years that were granted to him after the victory were sufficient to show that his humanity was as deep as his military knowledge, and his fellow countrymen, who, for the most part share and sympathise with his reserve and reticence, learned to understand him as only those people do understand one another who are incapable of giving full expression to their feelings. "The legion has lost a president," exclaimed one of them on hearing of his death, "but it has gained a patron saint."

If there be a Valhalla, as some of our ancestors liked to believe, where the great captains of the past sit down and feast together and tell again the story of their fights, this modest, quiet Scotsman will have his place there; but very seldom will he be persuaded to tell the story of how for three long years he commanded the greatest armies that his Empire ever put into the field, how in the darkest days his faith in their ability to conquer never faltered, and how he led them to victory in the end.



## Appendix A

### Letter from Sir Douglas Haig to General Joffre concerning plans for 1917

*From* *6th November, 1916.*  
The Commander-in-Chief,  
British Armies in France.

*To*  
The Commander-in-Chief,  
French Armies.

My dear General,

I am in general agreement with the views expressed in your letter No. 238, dated 1st November, 1916, as to the general principles on which our combined action should be based in the campaign of 1917, viz. that our offensive operations should be simultaneous and made on wide fronts.

I also agree that the area, broadly speaking, between BAPAUME and VIMY would be suitable for my offensive, in combination with a French offensive on a wide front between the OISE and the SOMME.

This arrangement would probably entail, as you point out, the maintenance of a defensive attitude, at any rate in the initial stages of our attacks, between LE TRANSLOY and the SOMME; although it appears to me that the tactical importance of the MONT ST. QUENTIN spur is so great, in relation to any attack within range of it, that active operations against that position may eventually prove to be unavoidable. Apart from that consideration I see no objection to a defensive front being interposed between our attacks.

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I am therefore prepared to make my arrangements on the general lines stated. The right of my attack would operate in the neighbourhood of BAPAUME in the first instance, the choice of objectives, and the exact line of advance, depending on the progress of our operations during the winter. The left of my attack would be directed, probably, on VIMY RIDGE. The total extent of front, between these two flanks, on which it would be possible for me to press home my attacks with the forces at my disposal, I estimate to be about 35,000 to 40,000 yards.

To enable me to undertake such extensive operations, as early as the weather will permit next year, the training of my troops during the winter becomes a vital consideration, which affects the questions of winter operations, alluded to in the first paragraph of your letter.

As already agreed on between us, in the general interests of the Allies, I will continue to operate offensively during the winter, to the utmost extent of my resources and opportunities, in order to hold the enemy's forces in our front and to wear them down as much as possible. My power in this respect is, however, limited by weather conditions and by training requirements.

As regards the former, the supply of my troops, especially the Fourth Army, presents great difficulties in wet weather.

My front of operations is now far beyond the crest of the ridge on the forward slopes completely overlooked by the enemy. All requirements have to be carried for very long distances over exposed ground, broken up by innumerable shells, and rendered almost impassable at present by the continued rain. These conditions are so exhausting to the troops that all their energies are consumed in bringing forward supplies and munitions, and in the frequent reliefs necessitated by the state of their trenches.

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Every possible effort is being made to overcome these difficulties and to improve communications, but this takes time and until it has been accomplished it is physically impossible for my troops to carry out attacks on distant objectives. I hope that the conditions will be much better in two or three weeks and that there will then be greater offensive possibilities. In the meantime such attacks as may prove possible, on close objectives, will be continued.

As regards training requirements a very considerable proportion of the personnel in my divisions consists now of almost untrained young officers and men, and to bring my units up to strength I have still to receive during the winter a large number of these with even less training. My armies will, in fact, consist mainly of what I can only describe as raw material, and without intensive training continued throughout the winter they cannot be fit for an offensive next spring.

I beg that you will not deduce from this statement of my difficulties, which I deem it advisable to make clear to you, that I have any intention of abandoning the winter offensive agreed on. But you will realise that such conditions impose limits on what I can do. They also affect the question, alluded to in the last paragraph of your letter, as to modifications of our respective fronts.

I propose to consider fully and at once what may be possible for me in that respect and then to communicate with you on the subject.

Yours very truly,

D. Haig,  
General.

## Appendix B

### Letter from Sir Douglas Haig to General Nivelle concerning plans for 1917

*From* 6th January, 1917.

The Commander-in-Chief,  
British Armies in France.

*To*

The Commander-in-Chief,  
French Armies of the North and North-east.

My dear General,

I beg to acknowledge receipt of your letters No. 23139, dated the 27th December, 1916, No. 655, dated the 1st January, 1917, and No. 1005, dated the 2nd January, 1917, on the subject of the plan of operations which we have already discussed, and the proposed relief of French troops by British.

I will deal first with the plan of operations, on which the solution of all minor problems depends. It is essential that there should be no room for misunderstanding between us on this question.

In your letter of the 2nd January you divide the operations into three phases.

In the first phase you propose that strong attacks shall be made by our respective armies with the object not only of drawing in and using up the enemy's reserves, but of gaining such tactical successes as will open the way for decisive action on the fronts of attack, either immediately or—later on—as a result of success obtained by you in the second phase. During this first phase adequate reserves are to be

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held ready either to exploit success immediately, or to continue to use up the enemy's reserves, according to the development of the situation.

I have already agreed to launch such an attack as you describe, but not to an indefinite continuation of the battle to use up the enemy's reserves. Such continuation might result in a prolonged struggle, like that on the SOMME this year, and would be contrary to our agreement that we must seek a definite and rapid decision.

In the second phase you propose that my offensive shall be continued while you seek a decision on another front. This I have also agreed to on the definite understanding that your decisive attack will be launched within a short period—about eight to fourteen days—after the commencement of the first phase; and, further, that the second phase also will be of very short duration. You will remember that you estimated a period of 24 to 48 hours as sufficient to enable you to decide whether your decisive attack had succeeded or should be abandoned.

The third phase, as described in your letter of the 2nd January, will consist in the exploitation by the French and British Armies of the successes previously gained. This is, of course, on the assumption that the previous successes have been of such magnitude as will make it reasonably certain that by following them up at once we can gain a complete victory and, at least, force the enemy to abandon the Belgian coast. On that assumption I agree also to the third phase on the general lines described in your letter.

But I must make it quite clear that my concurrence in your plan is absolutely limited by the considerations I have explained above, on which we have already agreed in our conversations on the subject. It is essential that the Belgian coast shall be cleared this summer. I hope and believe that we shall be able to effect much more than that, and within



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limitations of time I will co-operate to the utmost of my power in the larger plans which you have proposed.

But it must be distinctly understood between us that if I am not satisfied that this larger plan, as events develop, promises the degree of success necessary to clear the Belgian coast, then I not only cannot continue the battle but I will look to you to fulfil the undertaking you have given me verbally to relieve on the defensive front the troops I require for my northern offensive.

In short, the first two phases of the battle cannot be of "une durée prolongée", as you suggest on the first page of your letter of the 2nd January. If these two phases are not so successful as to justify me in entering on the third phase, then I must transfer my main forces to the north. To enable me to do this in sufficient time to carry out my plans it would be necessary that the relief of the troops on the southern part of my front should be carried out by the middle of June. Moreover, to give me sufficient force to carry out the northern attack, I should ask you to take over my front up to the Ancre valley.

Thus, there is, in fact, a fourth phase of the battle to be provided for in our plans. The need to carry it out may not, and, I hope, will not, arise. But the clearance of the Belgian coast is of such importance to the British Government that it must be fully provided for before I can finally agree to your proposals.

In our conversations you have already agreed in principle to these stipulations, and I shall be obliged if you will now inform me, after fuller consideration, that you can definitely accept them.

In this connection I beg that you will give full consideration to the question of what is the greatest extent of front on which you could relieve my troops if the need should arise, and if there should be a doubt of your being able to

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take over as far as the Ancre I beg that the possibility of obtaining the help of Italian troops may be carefully examined.

As regards the relief of your troops on my present right, subject to our final agreement on the plan of operations I have given orders that it is to commence on the 15th January, and I am arranging with the G.A.N. for a meeting to be held with representatives of my Fourth Army on Sunday next to settle details.

I calculate that it should be possible to complete the relief as far as the Villers-Bretonneux Road about the 15th February.

I trust that I have already made it clear to you that I cannot relieve your troops to the south of that road unless a larger number of divisions are sent to me than have so far been promised.

For my operations, in co-operation with you, on the Bapaume-Vimy front I require not less than 35 divisions. On my defensive front, to the Villers-Bretonneux Road I cannot do with less than 27 divisions until active operations are on the point of commencing.

This makes a total of 62, of which I have at present only 56. I expect two more from England this month and have been told that it is probable, but not certain, that I shall receive two in February and another in April, besides one Portuguese division.

No hope of any beyond these has been held out to me so far. I am again writing to the War Office on the subject.

In regard to the date of the allied offensive, it was agreed at the last conference of Commanders-in-Chief that the allies should be prepared to attack by the date mentioned in your letter of the 27th December if circumstances should render it necessary to do so. At the same time, however, I pointed out that my Armies could not be ready to attack in

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full force before the 1st May, and both the Russian and Italian representatives were also in favour of this later date.

It was recognised that it is of great importance that all the allies should attack practically simultaneously and in the greatest force possible, and personally I hold that view very strongly. Circumstances may compel us to take offensive action, with such forces as can be made available, before we are all fully ready; but we must regard it as a grave disadvantage if this should occur and we must strive to avoid it. We have evidence that the enemy fears the results of combined simultaneous action by the Allies in full force. We must expect him to take steps intended to prevent such combination, and we must beware of being deceived into complying with his intentions by launching attacks prematurely on any one front, or even on all.

Yours very truly,

D. Haig,  
Field-Marshal.

## Appendix C

Sir Douglas Haig's written instructions from Lord Kitchener, and subsequent instructions from Lord Milner.

1. His Majesty's Government consider that the mission of the British Expeditionary Force in France, to the chief command of which you have recently been appointed, is to support and co-operate with the French and Belgian Armies against our common enemies. The special task laid upon you is to assist the French and Belgian Governments in driving the German Armies from French and Belgian territory, and eventually to restore the neutrality of Belgium, on behalf of which, as guaranteed by Treaty, Belgium appealed to the French and to ourselves at the commencement of hostilities.

2. You will be informed from time to time of the numbers of troops which will be placed at your disposal in order to carry out your mission, and in this connection you will understand that, owing to the number of different theatres in which we are employed, it may not always be possible to give the information definitely a long time in advance.

3. The defeat of the enemy by the combined Allied Armies must always be regarded as the primary object for which the British troops were originally sent to France, and to achieve that end the closest co-operation of French and British as a united Army must be the governing policy;

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but I wish you distinctly to understand that your command is an independent one, and that you will in no case come under the orders of any Allied General further than the necessary co-operation with our Allies above referred to.

4. If unforeseen circumstances should arise such as to compel our Expeditionary Force to retire, such a retirement should never be contemplated as an independent move to secure the defence of the ports facing the Straits of Dover, although their security is a matter of great importance demanding that every effort should be made to prevent the lines which the Allied Forces now hold in Flanders being broken by the enemy. The safety of the Channel will be decided by the overthrow of the German Armies rather than by the occupation by our troops of some defensive position with their backs to the sea. In the event, therefore, of a retirement, the direction of the retreat should be decided, in conjunction with our Ally, with reference solely to the eventual defeat of the enemy and not to the security of the Channel. Notwithstanding the above, our Expeditionary Force may be compelled to fall back upon the Channel Ports, or the circumstances may be such that it will be strategically advantageous that, while acting in co-operation with the French Army, it should carry out such a retirement. The requisite steps required to meet this contingency should therefore receive due attention.

5. In minor operations you should be careful that your subordinates understood that risk of serious losses should only be taken where such risk is authoritatively considered to be commensurate with the object in view.

6. You will kindly keep up constant communication with the War Office, and you will be good enough to inform me regarding all movements of the enemy reported to you as well as those of the French Army.

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7. I am sure that you fully realise that you can rely with the utmost confidence on the whole-hearted and unswerving support of the Government, of myself, and of your compatriots.

Kitchener.

The War Office,  
28th December, 1915.

In consequence of the concurrence of His Majesty's Government in the appointment of General Foch as Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Forces on the Western front, it has become necessary to modify in some respects the instructions given you in War Office letter No. 121/7711 dated 28th December, 1915.

(1) The general objects to be pursued by the British Armies in France remain the same as those set forth in the first and second paragraphs of that letter.

(2) In pursuit of those objects you will carry out loyally any instructions issued to you by the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Forces. At the same time, if any order given by him appears to you to imperil the British Army, it is agreed between the Allied Governments that you should be at liberty to appeal to the British Government before executing such order. While it is hoped that the necessity for such an appeal may seldom, if ever, arise, you will not hesitate in cases of grave emergency to avail yourself of your right to make it.

(3) It is the desire of His Majesty's Government to keep the British Forces under your command as far as possible together. If at any time the Allied Commander-in-Chief finds it necessary to transfer any portion of the British troops to the French area in order to release French troops for purposes of roulement, it should be distinctly understood that this is only a temporary arrangement, and that

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as soon as practicable the troops thus detached should be reunited to the main body of the British Forces.

(4) You will afford to the American troops forming part of the Allied Armies in France such assistance in training, equipment, or administrative matters as may from time to time be required of you by the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Forces.

(5) Subject to any special directions you may receive from the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Forces, the principles laid down in the fourth paragraph of War Office letter No. 121/7711 of the 28th December, 1915, are to be regarded as still holding good.

(6) The fifth, sixth, and seventh paragraphs of that letter are maintained in their entirety.

Milner.

War Office,  
London, S.W.1.  
21st June, 1918.

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